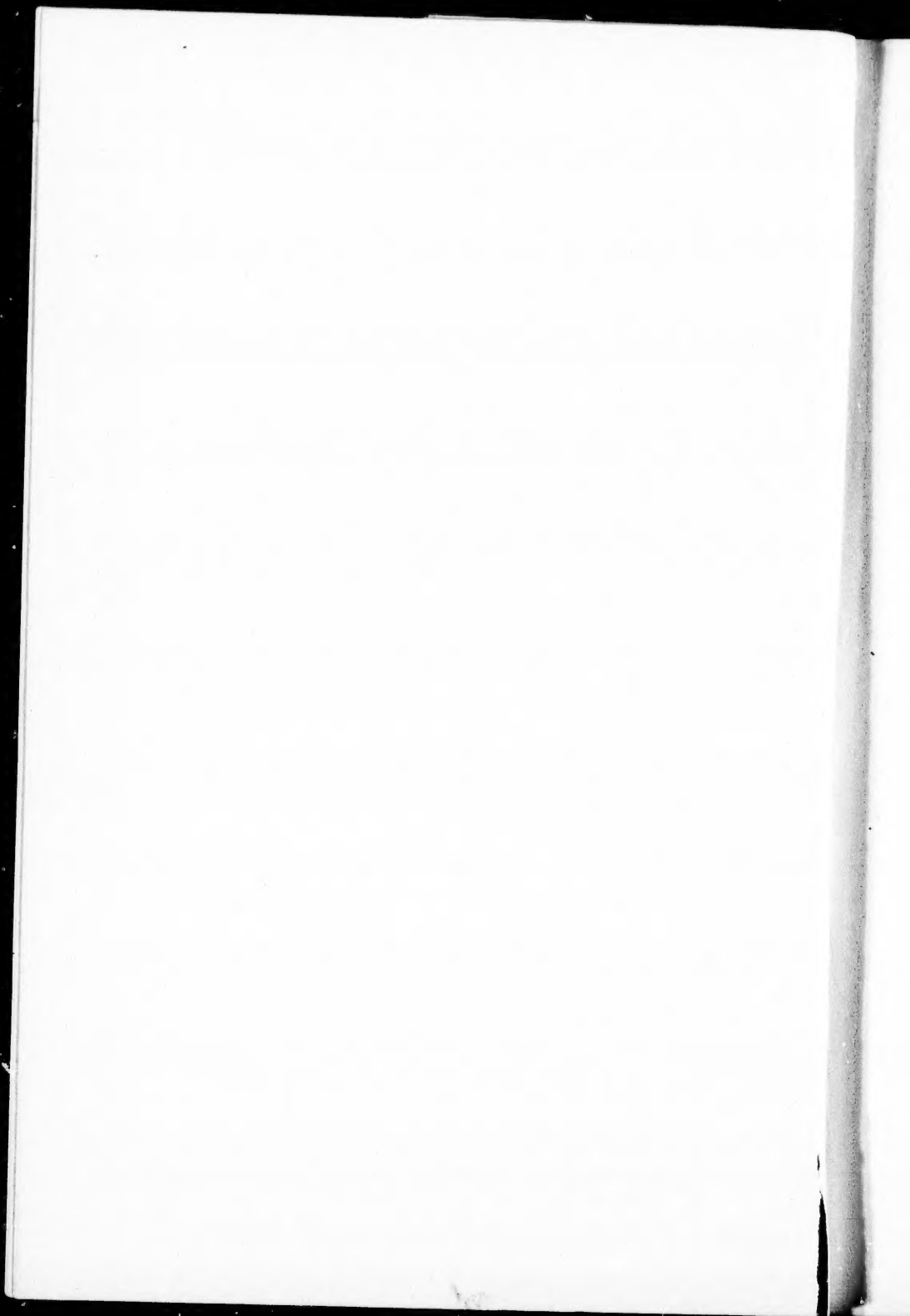


TERENCE



TERENCE

BY

B. M. CROKER

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"INFATUATION," "DIANA BARRINGTON," "BEYOND THE PALE," ETC.



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TO THE
IRISH TOURIST DEVELOPMENT

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED
WITH THE AUTHOR'S GOOD WISHES.

CARAGH LAKE,
CO. KERRY,
September 1899.

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TERENCE

CHAPTER I

"A PARIS MODEL"

(SCENE: *The show-rooms of Madame Désirée, near Bond Street. A fine afternoon, late in July.*)

"AND what is the price?" enquired a fashionable matron, indicating with a long-handled eyeglass the garment in which a model girl was revolving for her inspection.

"Forty-five guineas," responded the satin-clad saleswoman. Then lowering her voice to a confidential whisper, and casting a mysterious glance round the showroom, she added:—

"It only arrived from Paris this morning—*no one* has seen it yet. I had it put aside, as we expected Madame this afternoon, and knowing Madame's exquisite taste——"

Here she paused significantly, leaving the lady's vanity to supply the rest. Madame slowly inclined her head (with its Venetian-red tresses—and Parisian toque) in languid acknowledgment of this tribute. "Madame"—in other words, Mrs. Malpas, a wealthy, childless woman, on the wintry side of fifty—was equally renowned for her dress, her dinners, and her air of perennial youth! Thanks to a graceful figure and a capable maid, Mrs. Malpas, as she sat there in a summer gown and a white veil, with her back to the light, did not look a day over thirty.

And every woman is the age she looks.

"The new eel-skin skirt," continued the modiste, emphasizing the introduction with a sweeping gesture, "and quite the latest corsage—every one of the pearl paillettes is sewn on by hand; I assure Madame that for such a gown—the only one in town—the price is extremely moderate. Madame always likes to hear the first whisper of a new mode; if Madame approves, every one will approve, and next year this style will be the rage."

"She will never stand those sleeves—or, rather, no sleeves," interrupted the lady, in a somewhat querulous key.

"Ah! it is, then, for Madame's niece, the

beautiful Australian?" stepping back, with well-feigned surprise. "But how well it will suit her tall, slender figure, and exquisitely white skin. She is a most distinguished-looking young lady."

"She is a young lady who has most decided opinions of her own, Miss Coste, and who, in spite of her marvellous skin, cannot be induced to exhibit it."

"Still here, dear?" exclaimed a penetrating female voice, and a handsome brunette in a wonderful toilette, composed of muslin, lace, and scraps of sable, held up two little white-gloved hands in dramatic amazement.

"Oh, yes," drawled Mrs. Malpas. "I often sit here for *hours*." As she spoke she raised her gold lorgnette and gazed round the luxurious *salon*, where many fair customers lounged or strolled about, criticizing millinery, examining rare laces, weighing the rival claims of promenading models, or whispering over sketches with the air of conspirators who were hatching a tragedy.

"So do I, dear," confessed Lady Flashe, a well-known society hostess who looked a *débonnaire* five-and-twenty, whilst a pitiless "Peerage" chronicled her age at forty-three. She was a smiling, merry-eyed matron, and beamed on her

friend as she added, "It's immense fun—and I like to see what people are getting, don't you?"

"And what have you been ordering to day?" enquired Mrs. Malpas, with an air of weary interest.

"Only my Goodwood frocks. By the way, I'm having a lilac and white, exactly like yours."

The other lady's soft, deftly-powdered face, hitherto so suave and smiling, suddenly assumed a wooden expression, and her eyes a fixed stare.

"I know you don't mind, dearest," chattered on this fascinating burglar, who had just rifled her listener of a valuable and unique idea.

"*You* are never nasty about gowns—not like that odious Gwendoline Clare, who appears in perfect dreams of frocks, and, when I grovel before her and try to worm out the name of her dressmaker, calmly assures me that these works of art were run up by 'a little woman' in the country, or her own maid! As if I cannot see that they have 'Paris' written all over them in capital letters."

"No doubt," assented Mrs. Malpas, "some women would far rather reveal their true age than the name of their dressmaker."

"Yes; and the 'little woman' has invariably just recovered from small-pox, or measles, or mumps, or some deadly infectious disease. I really do wonder how Gwendoline, who pretends to be so religious, and attends early celebration, can tell such staggering lies."

"She likes to keep a good thing to herself, that's all," answered Mrs. Malpas, in an unsympathetic key. "For my part, I never admire her style—much too showy. Still, she dresses well, and is one of the last women to believe that any fool can make a skirt! By the way, dear Dulcie, I do wish you would not copy my gowns, though I am aware," and she looked up with a somewhat acrid smile, "that imitation is the sincerest flattery."

"But, dearest, your ideas are such inspirations! I'm sure you must lie awake for hours thinking out your frocks. It is really a sin to keep such good things to yourself, when everyone is ravenous for novelties. I see you here, confabbing with Miss Coste, turning over sketches, and whisking them out of sight. But it's all no use—genius will out. And, do you know, some people actually declare that *you* copy *my* gowns! Isn't it wicked of them?" and she laughed a little mocking laugh. "However, I'm going to wear the mauve and the pale

lemon—oh, did I say I had ordered that too?—at Dinard; and you will be queening it at Homburg, so we shan't clash."

Here Mrs. Malpas, suddenly remembering the patient model and the persuasive saleswoman, said, "I'd like to see the white and silver again, please, Miss Coste, and the pink and white; the pearl may wait."

"But surely, dear, the white is a *débutante's* frock," said Lady Flashe, suddenly assuming a confidential air as she sat down beside her. "Are you thinking of it for yourself? Are we to dress lamb fashion?"

"No," with an indignant gesture, "I'm not in my second childhood *yet*, and never dress unsuitably," staring at her companion's toque with angry significance. "It is for Miss D'Arcy."

"Ah! the Australian girl, Nita Fanshawe's half-sister."

"Yes, but so utterly different from Nita. She won't even take the trouble of choosing her own clothes. She really is an odd creature; barely one-and-twenty, yet hates dress, balls, society functions, and young men."

"How deliciously original—quite a new line to take up! I know some people think her even better looking than Nita, with her proud dark eyes, her black hair, and 'touch-me-not'

manner, but I must honestly confess that I don't see it. Give *me* Nita. She's immensely rich, though, isn't she?—I mean, Miss D'Arcy."

"Yes; gold mines, land in Melbourne, money in the funds. My brother-in-law made most of his money after he married her mother, who had a great fortune too, and poor dear Nita came off with a comparatively small dot."

"Still, she has some thousands a year?" said the other with a quick glance.

"True; but nothing to Maureen's income—it's an outlandish name—the Irish for Mary. She is ten years younger than Nita. Her poor mother married Mr. D'Arcy when he had his way to make. He made it at the Swan River—first in horses, then in gold; but my darling sister never lived to share his wealth. She was not suited for a rough Colonial life; she could not boil a potato or back a horse to save her life; could not exist without her little accustomed luxuries and dainty surroundings; and so she died, and D'Arcy sent the baby home to me. Nita has always been as my own child, and is surprisingly like me in appearance. What do *you* say?"

"I say that she is one of the loveliest women in London. You might be sisters," declared

Lady Flashe, who was credited with a soft heart and a mocking tongue.

Mrs. Malpas swallowed this gorgeous bait with a radiant smile, which was reflected, not to say exaggerated, on her companion's visage, then continued with increased animation:—

“Well, you know all about Nita, and how happily she is married to Sir Greville Fanshawe—a most excellent match. My brother-in-law chose for his second wife an Irish girl, Colonial born. She was killed out hunting, and she, too, left one girl, whom D'Arcy spoiled and adored. He kept her out with him till she was fifteen, and then he died.—Wasn't it selfish of him?”

“To die?”

“How absurd! To keep the girl with him till her ideas were quite formed. Imagine *me*, with this raw Colonial on my hands—half Irish, half Swan River. Fancy the combination!” casting up her pretty, faded eyes. “I sent her at once to a capital school, and afterwards to Dresden. Last year I brought her out and gave her the most perfect gowns; I presented her at a May Drawing Room, and took her to all the best places. She has enormous wealth, and I fully intended her to make a brilliant match.”

"Well, she could not possibly be in better hands," admitted her listener.

"Nevertheless, I wash my hands of her. She, as I tell you, hates clothes and smart parties and young men; never says the right thing, snubs the eligibles, and encourages all who are poor, lowly, and absolutely obscure."

"Dear me! What a contrast to Nita, who likes clothes, society, smart people, and—may I add?—young men."

"Why, of course you may. Greville is not a bit jealous; he likes Nita to be admired and amused."

"What a perfect jewel of a husband! And Miss D'Arcy, what are *her* tastes?"

"She is fond of her sister and Greville. She likes getting up at unearthly hours and galloping mad horses in the Row—the madder the better. She delights in going to race meetings, polo matches, horse shows, dog shows, and picture shows; but when I am taking her out to a tea, dinner, or dance, I feel as if I had some wild creature coiled up beside me in the carriage, longing to burst through the window and bound away, like one of her own kangaroos. Then, at a ball she prefers to sit wall-flowering, though she really dances particularly well, talking to old men or callow boys. She *likes* old men

and callow boys. She says she hates to be hugged round a room by a strange man, whose name she has scarcely grasped—she certainly has the most outrageous notions!—and there she will sit in a corner watching the world out of her great, wistful Irish eyes. Oh, she *is* a trial. To tell you the truth, Dulcie, the girl is a bitter disappointment to me. My handsome step-niece, with her half-million, ought to have married a duke."

"Yes, but dukes are getting scarce, and, besides, they don't always marry English girls."

Mrs. Malpas waved away this flippant objection, and added, "Although I am fond of Maureen, I cannot shut my eyes to the fact that she has been a social failure."

A little pause, during which Lady Flashe nodded to a smart lady who was hurrying through the rooms, followed by a smart maid.

"Are you taking her to Homburg?"

"No, thank goodness! She is dying to see Ireland."

"More than I am. I wish *I* were going to Homburg."

"Wish you were *there*, you mean; it's an abominable journey. Well, you know, Greville fishes at Ballybay regularly every season; so Maureen is to accompany him, and Nita."

"*Nita!*" with a little surprised scream.

"Yes, indeed; she declares she is sick of spas, and requires complete rest and change. I am expecting her and Maureen every moment to arrange about their gowns for the De la Crèmes' ball. Ah, and here they are at last!" as two young ladies made their appearance. The first, advancing with slow graceful movements, to the rustling accompaniment of silken skirts, was Lady Fanshawe, a striking figure, even in that *salon* of pretty women. Her grey eyes, rounded pink cheeks, perfect little mouth and nose, were set in a frame of magnificent hair of the true Venetian red. A white gown and a toque bristling with white wings enhanced her dazzling complexion. In one hand she carried a turquoise-blue sunshade, in the other a great bunch of pink roses. As she approached, with an assured and leisurely air, Nita Fanshawe made a really charming picture.

Following this vision of serene elegance strolled a tall young lady, with loosely dressed dark locks and deeply set dark eyes—eyes blue, heavily lashed, and mystic—a handsome girl, a young daughter of the gods—though the firmness of Miss D'Arcy's mouth and chin would have been more in keeping on the face of a good-looking brother. She wore a plain white

linen coat and skirt, an unobtrusive summer hat, and an expression of polite long-suffering. Such was Lady Fanshawe's half-sister, the great heiress and social failure.

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CHAPTER II

LADY FANSHAW AND HER SISTER

"So here you are, Auntie!" exclaimed Lady Fanshawe (her voice was much brisker than her movements). "And you too, Dulcie—but then I believe you *live* here! Gossip whispers that you have a secret chamber on the premises. I thought we should never arrive."

"So did I," agreed Mrs. Malpas. "It is four o'clock."

"We were kept ages at the flower-shop, and there was a frightful block in Piccadilly—a carriage accident. I declare it was only main force that prevented Maureen from flying out to help. She wanted to sit on a horse's head, or do something equally sensational; so I was obliged to sit on *her*."

"She always does," explained Maureen, with a flash of white teeth, and an unexpected smile.

"And is that Maureen's gown?" continued

Lady Fanshawe, now critically eyeing the newest French model.

"Well, I rather fancy it ; what do all you say ? It is quite new, and most uncommon."

"But, my dear Aunt Rosa, is this for *me* ?" asked Miss D'Arcy, with an expression of genuine dismay.

Mrs. Malpas nodded complacently.

"But why ? I am not doing the air cure ?"

"What nonsense you are talking, child !—what *do* you mean ?"

"Surely you have heard of the new cure where people promenade among pine forests, wearing next to no clothes. When they hear anyone coming they ring a bell to warn them off. If I wore that," pointing to the model, "I should be compelled to carry a dinner-gong !"

"How absurd, Maureen ! You do say the oddest things, and have the most shocking ideas."

"But the bodice is a mere suggestion—an outline ; there are no sleeves. If I might wear a gown underneath it, like this young lady, I should not mind ; otherwise the costume is really too much—or, rather, too little !"

"Maureen, you are a trial," protested her chaperon, with a melancholy shake of her head.

"Yes, I know it is very hard on you, dear aunt, to have an uncivilized niece who has no more taste in dress than a laughing jackass, and cannot appreciate *le dernier cri*; but I'll promise to wear any colour from sea-green to sky-blue, and any stuff from tapestry to tulle, always provided that it covers me."

"Oh! then I'm afraid, Miss Coste, you must take that away," said Mrs. Malpas, in a heart-broken voice. "Let me see the white satin—the one I had thought of for myself."

Miss Coste lost no time in summoning two more models, and whilst Mrs. Malpas was examining these Lady Flashe turned to Lady Fanshawe, and said—

"So I hear you are actually off to Ireland, of all places. I had *no* idea that you were a fisherwoman. Have you ever done any fishing?"

"Only for compliments," volunteered her sister. "But a lucky and experienced angler——"

"Don't mind Maureen. I know no more about fishing than she does; but we hope to live and learn. Greville raves about Ballybay—the air, the people, the sport, the scenery; he goes there as regularly as he goes to the Derby, only he remains two months instead of

two or three hours, and I am gasping to discover its great attractions, and if it really *is* fish."

"Or a mermaid," suggested Lady Flashe, with a malicious little laugh. "I'm afraid you will be most shockingly bored. I myself loathe fishing. Imprisoned all day in a wet boat, one's hair all over the place, one's hook in everyone's hair, *no* afternoon tea. But there! don't let me discourage you. It is very sweet of you to take an interest in your husband's pursuits; your price is above rubies."

"Oh, as for that, I'll 'recuperate,' as the Americans say; catch a salmon and perhaps the brogue, and have the amusement and excitement of chaperoning Maureen."

"And what a responsibility that will be!"

"Won't it, dear? I feel quite frightened when I think of it," and her eyes followed her sister, who had walked away to inspect some hats.

"She does not look like a great heiress."

"No, that's one comfort. She is more like a poor hanger-on, and is most anxious to play the *rôle*."

"Then I should afford her every encouragement if I were you—it may lead to all sorts of amusing mistakes—there are sure to be 'incidents.' But, whatever you do, do not allow her to marry an Irishman!"

"*Allow her!* It is very fine to talk about 'allowing.' She will marry whom she pleases—a sweep, if she took the bit in her teeth!"

"Good heavens! Oh, my poor Nita, how I pity you! Let us hope there are no sweeps in Ballybay; luckily, it is summer time, and they are not in request——"

"Do you see Mrs. Fortesque Foularde over there, looking at blouses? How dreadfully she has gone off! She has been downright plain this season, and last year she was lovely."

"But don't you think that people grow plain, and then recover all their good looks?—it's one of my pet theories," said Lady Flashe, "and everyone has her pretty and ugly days—except you, Nita—*your* days are all pretty."

"How sweet of you, Dulcie! Maureen can't say that I fished for that compliment," rejoined Lady Fanshawe, with a brilliant smile. "Well, we shall meet to-night at the Square, and can have a nice, comfortable talk after dinner—if we have not the men in on our heels. By the way," suddenly stooping, "here is someone's gold bangle" (reading aloud the inscription), "D. V. F. 18—Oh!" with a little gasping laugh. "Well, I *never* should have thought it."

"Thought what, dear?" asked Lady Flashe, extending her hand, and carelessly resuming the ornament. "I need scarcely tell you that it was a christening present."

"Oh, was it?" with a bewildered look. "But *I* had mugs and spoons."

"And spoons ever since. Eh?"

"No, no," waving a deprecatory hand. "How can you be so ridiculous! Well, *au revoir*, dear, for here I behold my own perfect fitter. Come along, Auntie; come, Maureen."

Exit Lady Fanshawe and her relatives, led by the saleswoman, and followed by no fewer than three models, two maids, and a score of admiring eyes.

CHAPTER III

"THE BLACK SWAN"

"I WAS just waiting until those people had gone," observed a befeathered old dowager, suddenly emerging from behind the sheets of a ladies' paper. "I positively cannot stand Mrs. Malpas—dressed *à l'enfant*, with her hair, or rather wig, all sticking out—I dislike her manners, her toilettes, and her schemes."

"Oh, but, my dear Lady Langueville, she really has the most marvellous ideas about clothes," protested Lady Flashe. "If she were to open an academy, half the women in London would swarm to it; as it is, numbers of people travesty her inspired creations; and if I did not know that she is a woman of good old family, I should suspect that she had been in the business—though women of family *are* in the business, for that matter—and as for her schemes, they are generally crowned with success!"

"At any rate, she married that niece of hers to an excellent *parti*, Sir Greville Fanshawe, a charming man—very wealthy and popular. We knew him so well once"—here she heaved a profound sigh. "I never, never dreamt that he would be caught by a pretty face and an empty head. He struck me as liking a more quiet, well-read, solid style of woman; and then he was always such a club man, and devoted to sport."

"And now he is devoted to his wife, who is quite one of the prettiest women in town."

"I grant that she is what is called 'a smart married woman.' Upon my word, I'd make some of them smart if I had to deal with them! Such wives were not known in my day. Nita Fanshawe is a vain, restless, impulsive little idiot. The Black Swan is worth a dozen of her."

"Black Swan?" repeated Lady Flashe, with raised brows.

"Yes, so they call her sister. I suppose because she is rather a *rara avis*—a modest, self-respecting girl."

"Or is it merely because she is dark, and has a long neck, and comes from the Swan River? I call her a black goose—a still better name would be 'the Boomerang'—for her shafts are

most wild and unexpected, and yet thrown with a sure hand. Although I have suffered myself, still, I must own that I like her."

"Mrs. Malpas has not got her married yet, though her exertions have been immense."

"No, she declares that the girl is a social failure! In other words, she promptly refused Lord Runarig, and declined to be Lady Blore."

"I think she was wise. Why should a great heiress become an old man's possible darling, and certain nurse, merely for the pleasure of having a coronet on her note-paper?" demanded Lady Langueville.

"I agree with you. Miss D'Arcy will probably marry a master of hounds. She likes outdoor exercise, and is a magnificent horse-woman. You should see her! She is always in the Row about nine o'clock."

"And I"—with an impatient gesture—"I attribute my excellent health to the fact that I never venture out till past mid-day. Our mornings are too raw to be trifled with, and our climate is only endurable, as Horace Walpole said, 'when it is framed and glazed.'"

"He was not far wrong; but Maureen D'Arcy does not fear raw mornings, and has no hesitation in offering her complexion to the wind and weather. She hates society crushes, society

jargon, and holds a ball as cheaply, and considers it as much an infliction, as any of our bored young men."

"I must positively have a good look at her to-morrow—I'm dining with Mrs. Malpas. Oh, yes! she asks me to dinner—I retaliate with a tea! I don't mind dining with her in the least; she has a capital *chef*, and one sees next to nothing of one's hostess. Thank goodness! I am not likely to sit near Mrs. Malpas. I really cannot be bothered with her when I'm shopping, and that's the worst of these sort of places, you come across people you don't want to see. I suppose I shall find Mrs. Malpas at Homburg—there I am her easy prey. Every morning she appears at half-past seven at the 'Elizabeth Brunnen,' in a full garden-party toilette. Between our three glasses she marches me up and down, but this year she will have her new niece to trot out, and I shall be released."

"I am sorry to deprive you of your little crumb of comfort, but Miss D'Arcy is going to Kerry with Sir Greville and her sister—rather a responsibility for Nita Fanshawe?"

"Not at all," rejoined the old lady. "The responsibility will be the other way about; Nita will be a terrible charge for that poor young creature—a millstone round her neck."

Lady Flashe burst into a loud peal of laughter. "How funny you are!" she cried. "You remind me of a girl who said to me quite seriously, 'Well, I've married the mater at last! She was an immense anxiety till I got her settled.'"

"What an abominable minx! I hope you boxed her ears. But Nita Fanshawe going to Ireland, and into retreat, as I may say, is most extraordinary. Where is the place? Are there cavalry barracks in the neighbourhood?"

"I fancy not. It is celebrated for sea, lake, and river fishing, several good hotels, romantic scenery, and the handsomest peasantry in Ireland."

"Well, I dare say Sir Greville will be happy, and the Black Swan can flap her wings and enjoy the wild, free life; but Nita, who lies in bed till mid-day, and cannot exist without excitement, incense, the latest news, and her latest admirer, what is her ostensible reason for this expedition? What lie follows by post?"

"She wishes to discover the true character of the locality."

"Fancy Nita Fanshawe taking up the character of a place—or a person!" interrupted the old lady with angry scorn.

"She suspects that it embraces more than fish and scenery."

"Ah!" and suddenly Lady Langueville became animated and alert. "*I* have it! You remember young Captain MacLawless, who was a good deal with Lady Fanshawe this season?—a notorious Lothario, but a keen fisherman—*he* is going to Ireland. I always like to see to the bottom of things; now I can understand Lady Fanshawe's plans."

"But really there is not a bit of harm in Nita," protested the other with warmth. "She cannot help being pretty and graceful. She is very fond of Sir Greville, and when you come to think of it, *all* nice women are flirts."

"So you may say—but I don't agree with you. And as for Lady Fanshawe's poor simple sister, she will have her hands full. She will be compelled to scheme for her, lie for her, screen her, amuse her on wet days, and generally keep her out of mischief! Sir Greville believes he has a wife like Cæsar's; that is the worst of a husband who was never a lady's man—he is not experienced. He trusts Nita Fanshawe absolutely; she stands on a pedestal, he worships and adores; but I happen to know, for a *fact*, that a woman suspiciously like her dined at Prince's and afterwards went to 'The

Liars' alone with a man—that time Sir Greville was in Scotland. When the cat's away, you see——" And her smile suggested a special jury.

"I don't believe Nita ever did anything so silly," said Lady Flashe, indignantly. "Nita is not a fool."

"Oh, she is silly enough for anything; all susceptibility and no brains; and if her husband is not jealous, yet—*she* is. He happened to sit out two or three dances with his old, old friend, my Perdita, and she actually came up and hustled him off, looking as black as thunder—such a bad style!"

"Perhaps she wanted to go home?" suggested Lady Flashe. "Or she may have heard a whisper of his little flirtation with Perdita?"

"Flirtation! It was nothing of the kind! It was a most serious affair, and he behaved disgracefully. However, Perdita is a truly good Christian girl, and has forgiven him—though I have not. Ah! even the watched pot boils in time—here is my black lace gown at last, so I must really say good-bye. Come and see me soon. Remember—the *third* Tuesday in the month; be sure you don't forget!"

As the dowager surged away, being towed

off, so to speak, by a tug in the shape of a diminutive French fitter, Lady Flashe, who was now alone, deliberately arranged her veil at a mirror, picked up her sunshade, and muttered to herself as she swept out—

“Be sure I *shall* forget—you old cat!”

CHAPTER IV

"THE RED SUNSHADE"

"AND is *this* the thing they call a coach in Ireland?" asked Lady Fanshawe, who, disguised in a voluminous dust-cloak and white gauze veil, stood outside Carra station, surveying the lofty yellow char-à-banc and four fine horses, which awaited passengers for Ballybay. On the box sat a burly, weather-beaten driver, at the horses' heads stood a youthful guard, and all around lounged a typical Irish crowd, exchanging witticisms, and passing audible remarks upon the quality who were about to proceed by road. Among these were two maiden ladies—the elder carried a small basket, into which she had squeezed a large black cat (who scorned to keep his grievances to himself); Sir Greville Fanshawe, a good-looking little man, with pleasant dark eyes, prematurely grey hair, and an active and alert manner, anxiously

solicitous about his rods and tackle; a lady's maid, in charge of a dressing-bag (of the latest shape), an elderly rector and his wife, taking their summer holiday; an old gentleman, in a plaid cape; and a little tourist, who had been strutting to and fro for some time uttering impatient imprecations, wearing a loud, ginger-coloured suit, blue spectacles, and a huge moustache; last of all, Maureen D'Arcy, bright-eyed, and radiant as the morning. Whilst the luggage was being stowed away in the boot, the passengers commenced to take their seats. Lady Fanshawe gathered together her cloak and skirts, and looked helplessly about her (but, alas, Sir Greville was engrossed in the problem of fitting in a rod case). Then she ascended two steps, and came to a full stop.

"Here ye are, ma'am!" cried an old man, advancing from the crowd. "Ye need not be unaisy—I'll assist ye. Sure I was twenty year a tram conductor, and ladies' ankles is no thrate to *me*!"

"An' will ye shut yer mouth, Tim Nolan?" cried the driver. "Excuse him, miss, sure he is an ignorant poor creature, and wants a day in the week."

"We all know what *you* want, Tom—and that's a half-crown."

This retort—with its coarse allusion to the coachman's tip—provoked a roar of laughter.

"I've engaged the box seat," announced the individual in the ginger suit, pushing rudely in front of Lady Fanshawe. "I wish to see the country—and I've paid for it."

"I'm sure I've no objection," she murmured to Maureen. "I much prefer being far at the back, where I can't see what the horses are doing."

"And I like to watch them," said her sister, taking a place directly behind the coachman.

"You ought to be a groom, and *live* in a stable!" snapped her ladyship, who was invariably peevish when she felt uncomfortable or nervous. She hated having to drive fourteen miles on this abominable vehicle, and the horses looked so big and jumpy. She detested this watching, grinning crowd; and, to add to her miseries, there was a high wind blowing, and she felt that her hat was lop-sided and would shortly part company with her veil. However, at last she successfully settled down behind a big red sunshade, with her fox-terrier Taffy in her lap.

The coach was loaded up; the gossoon guard swung into his place, and blew his horn with all his soul and all his strength, and away went

the four shining bays, rattling up the high street at a smart canter. It was market day in Carra ; buyers and sellers with one consent hurried out of shops to watch the mail pass. It afforded a thrilling and elevating spectacle to many of the owners of the asses' cars who thronged the little square, and since dawn had driven laboriously at a foot-pace from far-distant glens or lochs, transporting their slender supplies of homespun tweed, skinny chickens, and mountain honey. To witness that stirring sight gave them a topic for the whole week—to relate how Tom Sweeny handled the bay team, and clapped on the pace coming up the hill, how he shaved Murphy's corner, and was near being the death of Katty's new pig, how there was a power of English quality on the coach—one lady with a splendid red umbrella—and how Joey, the guard, was growing out of his coat.

Presently the travellers cleared the long, slate-grey town, with its suburbs of mud cabins, and entered on a wide and winding plain, bounded on one hand by the riotous Atlantic, on the other by the stately Kerry mountains. Here they encountered the full force of a stiff breeze, which violently agitated veils and feathers ; but Maureen sniffed in the keen salt air, with its hint of peat and furze, as if it were the breath

of life. The road lay over a great expanse of boggy moorland, up and down tedious hills, between deep ditches of melancholy black water, or loose stone walls; it was a narrow route, winding round the base of mountains, and the spanking team were liable to such obstructions as a pair of donkeys rolling comfortably in the dust, or a leisurely and defiant flock of geese who questioned the right of way.

To Lady Fanshawe, nervous, irritable, and dishevelled, the scene was too hideous for words; but Maureen's Irish blood was dancing gaily in her veins, and she found her surroundings delightful. The wild stretches of dark peat, with great stalks of bog cotton swaying in the gale; the wonderful purple shades, which chased one another over the hill slopes; the gigantic bunches of foxglove and heather, endeavouring, despite the stones, to advertise themselves by the roadside; and here and there the blue, curling smoke, indicating the homes of the sleek little cows and scampering white pigs who grazed by the wayside, and occasionally raced the coach.

And now the driver, well started on his journey, began to engage his companion in conversation. He pointed out various places of interest, including the scene of a bloody

murder,—he gave a good account of Ballybay, “A great saison entirely—a power of strangers, and the company running three coaches a day. Yes, bedad, the cattle were the best in all Ireland—no doubt his honour had an eye for a horse.”

“Oh, yes,” he assented, with an air of condescension, “they might be worse !”

“Sure, they couldn’t be better ! Terence, the coachman, chose them himself in Cahirmee fair, and there isn’t a finer judge in Ireland. He buys and sells horses for the company, and breaks in all the teams.”

“Indeed !” rejoined the box seat, with languid indifference.

“Mr. Flanigan, he bought one wheeler, and faix, that was more than plenty !—you’d want a whip-maker to be sitting on the box, he was that bone lazy. Terence picks the well bred ones, as has a good strain—maybe a bit of the old Birdcatcher or Harkaway. He gets a fine young colt for twenty-five pounds, for horses is chape in Kerry.”

“Oh, I hope it is not only horses that are cheap in Kerry.”

The driver turned and looked curiously at his companion, as he answered—

“Ye can buy a fine ass for thirty shillin’,

so they tell me, but I never go beyond horses meeself."

"We'll meet Terence driving the three o'clock out of Ballybay this side of the Devil's Elbow, and I'll go bail ye never cast your eye over four finer chestnuts. He will get three hundred for them the end of the saison. Begorra, Terence is worth his weight in gold!"

"Why?"

"Why? Bekase he is a grand whip—no horse ever bested *him* in coach or saddle—he is young and souple, and terribly detarmined. I've known him wait for seven hours on a colt that differed wid him as to the best way home. Och! 'tis he has the patience and never gives in. Besides, hasn't he the most elegant hands that ever held a pair of reins?"

"Then, do you break in horses too?"

"Bedad, no, yer honour, an' I'll tell ye no lie; I'm a married man, wid a heavy family, and some of them young wans are just born divils! Now and then I take a middling trained one, when we are a bit tight in horses. For example, yesterday my near leader got an over-reach, and so I bid to make shift with that little spotted mare there," pointing with his whip. "She is going very kind, ye see; Terence bought her out of a turf cart a while

back; she is just three off, and has only been wance in the coach."

"Once in the coach!" repeated his listener, in a tone of incredulous horror.

"Yes, she's all right; but before we come to the long hill I bid to tighten her breeching, for when she feels the weight behind her heels she's apt to break out kicking—it's her only fault."

Maureen, who had been listening to this conversation with the deepest interest, noticed that the little man on the box seat ceased to twirl his great moustache, and that his complexion had assumed the shade of a tallow candle.

At this moment a sudden diversion drew off Miss D'Arcy's attention. The cat, wearied of narrow quarters and incarceration, began a series of wailing expostulations in the best deep notes of his whole gamut. In a second Taffy, roused as by a war cry, plunged out of his mistress's arms, and hurried to the basket in order to deal with its contents! Here a frantic scrimmage ensued between Taffy, the cat, and the cat's owner, whose lap was the theatre of a siege, a sally, and a repulse!—Taffy barking hysterically and tearing at the basket, the cat spitting, the cat's mistress rending the

air with her screams. However, in a short time, thanks to Maureen, a truce was proclaimed. She cuffed Taffy soundly, and handed him by the scruff of his neck into the custody of the maid, offered ample apologies to the old lady, but nothing would appease the cat! And now the coach drew up at the summit of a long hill, at the foot of which there lay a mile or two of narrow bog road, and then an equally long ascent.

"Joey, me boy, get down; now, look sharp! Where the mischief is that gossoon?" asked the driver, turning round.

"If you mean the guard," replied Sir Greville quietly, "he got off just now, and ran down the lane with a brown-paper parcel."

"Oh, to be sure—Mrs. Farrell's Sunday gown. He will meet us at the foot of the hill; but, bad scran to him, 'tis *now* I want him. What on the living earth am I to do?"

"Can I assist you?" asked Sir Greville.

"Well, sir, I'd be thankful if ye'd just slip down and tighten the breeching on the near leader a couple of holes."

Sir Greville alighted at once, but the animal was fidgety, and he was far more familiar with fishing-tackle than with harness; so he bungled and bungled, till at last the driver called out—

"Hould on wan minute, sir, and I'll do it meself. Just stand before their heads. Here, yer honour," to the little man, "take a good hould of the reins ; they won't stir."

"His honour" received this charge precisely as if an explosive had been handed to him ; his countenance expressed nothing short of supreme mortal fear—beads of perspiration broke out upon his livid face, and his hands shook pitiably. To think that he, who had never driven in all his life, should be left in sole charge of a team of half-broken Irish horses ! The portly coachman descended with astonishing agility, had already settled straps to his complete satisfaction, and was turning to resume his seat, when there was a sudden gust of wind, a sharp scream, and Lady Fanshawe's umbrella, blown out of her hand, whirled over the coach, and descended on the astonished ears of the off leader, who instantly bounded forward like a creature possessed of devils, accompanied by the inexperienced and flighty spotted mare.

Sir Greville narrowly escaped being run over ; an ascending turf cart was not so fortunate, the coach crashed into it, scattering sods to the four winds ; the coachman's shouts were dispersed in the same quarters, the reins slipped from the holder's paralyzed grasp, and the

runaway team, minus a driver, descended the long hill at a break-neck gallop.

What a moment! The heavy char-à-banc lurched and pitched like a ship in the roaring forties. Lady Fanshawe shrieked at the top of her voice. Taffy, believing that this glorious sport had been got up for his sole amusement, barked his very best, and Maureen's neighbour flung herself into her arms—cat and all.

But Miss D'Arcy heartlessly shook her off, and with a brief "Hold tight," climbed over into the coachman's place, and called out to the box seat to "stop gibbering and catch the reins." The box seat happened to be deaf and speechless, confronting death with a frenzied white face and chattering fear. So the lady, at great peril to her balance on the rocking coach, hooked them up with an umbrella handle, and "took hold." Her slight, girlish strength made but small difference, save that she attempted to steer the demoralized team, and even her light hand was better than trailing broken reins, which would have precipitated the impending catastrophe.

"Sit tight, all of you!" she shouted back. "Don't scream! Stop that dog, he is driving them mad!"

Down they raced, clatter, clatter — bang,

bang—the wind cutting their faces and whistling past their ears. Maureen's hat was blown away, her hair had come adrift; still she sat unmoved, an upright, collected figure, striving by main force and example to save the lives of her fellow passengers. The "box seat" beside her, doubled in two—an abject spectacle of unmanned fear—was prepared to leap off, and save himself at the first pause in their headlong career.

Maureen drew a deep breath when they arrived, swaying and pitching, but safe, at the bottom of the long hill. The worst was over. A long, level stretch lay before them, and the course was clear.

Their chance hitherto had been about ninety to one, and she put forth all her strength—such as it was—and endeavoured to pull the horses together, in order to keep them in the middle of the narrow, straight road. As they galloped wildly along, she observed a small dark speck rapidly descending the opposite hill. Then her brave heart stood still for a second, as she realized that this, no doubt, was the other coach!

CHAPTER V

A RACE FOR LIFE

TERENCE, the far-famed whip and trainer, was a spare young man, twenty-eight or thirty years of age, square-shouldered, sinewy, and active ; there was not an ounce of superfluous flesh on his well-knit frame. He wore no hair on his face, and consequently fully displayed a remarkably firm mouth and chin. His features were severely cut, his eyes dark grey and black-lashed, whilst his closely-cropped locks were a shade lighter than his skin, which was tanned to a healthy bronze.

It was a fine resolute face, typical of a race of bold and well-born ancestors. But whatever his descent, this young man was now a mere professional whip, guiding the vaunted chestnuts with an ease and finish that were exclusively his own. At the present moment he was smoking an excellent cigar, and listening with

amused eyes to some story that was being related to him by the occupant of the box seat—a sunburnt officer, who had been enjoying capital sport at Ballybay.

“This is a rattling good team, Terence,” he remarked. “I like driving a quick lot.”

“So do I. But how about three and a slug?”

“Tomlin had a brute like that once. Tomlin is a fair driver, but too fond of the whip. I remember one day at a critical moment he lost half his lash round a telegraph post.”

“From what I remember of him, I’m surprised he had any to lose.”

“Don’t you find this hard work, week in and week out, and for hours every day?—four horses are a terrible weight on one’s hands.”

“Yes; but I am used to it, and it develops the muscles of the arm.”

“Your muscles were pretty well developed in old days—why on earth do you stick to the business?”

“I needs must, when the devil drives.” As he spoke he turned a corner with workmanlike dexterity, and began to descend the long hill leading to the narrow road. Below him he casually noticed the approaching coach. Presently he looked again, and discovered something which caused him to fling away his

half-smoked cigar and put his wheelers into a canter, for he comprehended that death was flying towards him, and had already prepared to face it.

"What's up?" enquired his companion, lazily. "That was a real good Havana you chucked."

"The two-o'clock coach. The horses have bolted. I am making for the cross." And here, having reached the flat, he urged the whole team to a gallop.

"It's the only place where they can pass. If we meet them at their present pace, there's bound to be a bad accident—an immortal smash."

"You'll do it, old boy, with a stone in hand."

"Yes, but what can have happened to Tom Sweeny? He is not on the coach; and by George, it's being driven by a woman!"

As he spoke he wheeled his team into a by-road with extraordinary precision, and waited. He had barely half a minute to spare—a half-minute of breathless suspense—everyone craned forward to gaze at the approaching runaway; and it soon passed with thundering hoofs and rattling harness in a cloud of dust, bearing a load of stricken passengers with blanched faces, and a barking dog. A man on the box seat

sat crouched with his back bent down, his elbows on his knees ; raised high above him was a bare-headed girl with a dauntless countenance and a great veil of black hair streaming wildly behind her. She had twisted the reins tightly round her wrists, and was straining every nerve to control the frantic horses.

"Keep them to the hill!" shouted Terence. "Then put the drag on!"

"'Pon my soul, she looks like Phaeton driving the chariot of the sun!" exclaimed his companion. "And a rare good plucked one! That's the sort of girl for *me*."

"It is a sort that will probably be killed at the Devil's Elbow, unless she can hold them in hand," rejoined the driver. "The corner is a nasty place at the best of times, but with a runaway they are bound to go over into the river-bed, and there are a lot of women—I must do something," putting his hand to his forehead. "There's just half a chance. Here, Jack, hold the reins!" and he began to tear off his heavy driving-coat with furious haste. "You take this team on; don't hustle them, and, for God's sake, don't touch the off-wheeler with the whip! I'll cut over the mountain—I've a run in me still; I may catch them at the boreen."

As he spoke he was climbing down; at the

word "boreen" he was gone. He leapt a neighbouring wet ditch, and began to breast the slope with the long, steady lope of an experienced runner.

* * * * *

"Well, I'm blessed if this isn't a nice business!" muttered the man with the reins; "wish I'd thought of going—but Terence is always so prompt. Here he is off like a shot, and leaves me with a notoriously nervous team. I hope we won't have another runaway." Then turning round, he asked jocosely, "Would anyone like to drive?"

"It's a quare shifting of drivers as is going on this day," remarked a respectable pig-jobber; "but we will lave the reins wid yer honour. Sure every wan knows ye can handle the ribbons and sit over horses, or ye would not be so great wid Terence—that has forsook us, here on a bog lane, like the babes in the wood."

"It was the only thing to be done," remarked a grey-haired priest. "Please God he is in time."

"Did you see the poor unfortunate creature beside the girl—him as was doubled in two wid the fear of death?" asked an elderly farmer.

"Ah! go long!" retorted the man who had compared himself to a babe in the wood; "'twas some ould lady in the new bi-cycling dress. If that was a man, I'm a alligator."

At this point they encountered a distracted gentleman, who came running towards them at a headlong speed, calling out, spasmodically—

"The coach—the coach—the other coach!—have you seen it? Where is it?"

"On the road a mile ahead."

"My wife and sister are on it. Are they safe?"

"Well, I trust it will be all right," replied the coachman's substitute. "The driver of this team has run across the mountain to stop it, and if any man in Ireland can do it he will."

"Which way did he go?"

"There, up the sheep track; I hope he was in time."

"Troth, if he is not, they are as dead as mutton," said the farmer. "Sure no horses that ever were foaled could gallop round the Devil's Elbow!"

Sir Greville scarcely heard these consoling observations. He was once more hurrying onward, and at a pace that would have caused his London friends to gape and gasp in amazement.

CHAPTER VI

TERENCE

THE long dead pull of a long Irish hill had a sobering effect upon the horses. The wheelers, who were middle-aged, began to be thoroughly ashamed of themselves, but the spotted mare and the sprightly off-leader had not yet recovered from the effects of the red sunshade. However, Maureen was inclined to hope that her greatest difficulties were now surmounted, and that she would be able to drive the team triumphantly to their destination—always provided that no other sensational incidents interrupted their journey. At the top of the steep ascent she addressed her craven companion, and said, "I believe I can pull them up, if you will please climb down, and put the drag on."

"I know nothing about drags," he snarled, "but pull up if you *can*, my good girl."

The girl made a mighty effort, put forth all her strength, and brought the horses to a momentary standstill. Then, turning to her neighbour with a scornful face and imperious gesture, she said—

“Get off the coach!”

“Just what I intended to do,” he answered, instantly precipitating himself down, as if on a fire-escape. And when once more safely established on *terra firma*, he broke into furious denunciations of coach and company.

“All right, young lady, I’ll put on the drag for you,” volunteered the rector, which feat he accomplished most dexterously, whilst the leaders danced about the road, and Lady Fanshawe pleaded, “Oh, Maureen, Maureen, do let me get down *too*!”

But the team was again in motion, now going steadily and soberly downhill. The distance was more than half-accomplished, when all at once the spotted mare was seized with a fit of kicking—she lashed out in the face of the near wheeler, who flung himself angrily upon the pole. In a second, the four horses appeared to be inextricably mixed, entangled in a hard knot, and Maureen for the first time was filled with despair. It was precisely at this critical period that the

passengers beheld a man—a gentleman—running at full speed across a field; he vaulted a gate, and was at the leaders' heads in a trice. Strange to say, the moral effect was immediate. He soothed the spotted mare, patted her foolish companion, gave a sharp word to the wheelers, and in another moment he had assumed the reins and the box seat.

"It's all right now," he announced over his shoulder. "They know me, and will go like lambs; you need not be the least nervous."

Certainly the change was magical. "Hi up!" he shouted; and the mere sound of his voice, and the feel of his strong grip on their bits, changed the riotous, unruly quartette into four repentant and respectable horses. Maureen looked on with bewilderment as she watched him pulling them together with, apparently, ridiculous ease.

"Sorry to supplant you," he said, addressing her suddenly. The stranger had a clear, pleasant voice—a touch of the brogue—and it seemed to Miss D'Arcy that there was a mocking little twinkle in his eye, which roused her to rejoin—

"Don't mention it."

Nevertheless, this unexpected succour was

such an overwhelming relief that her highly-strained nerves were at the point of giving way, and but for very shame's sake she would have burst into tears. However, this stranger's example stirred her pride; the wonderful *sang froid* with which he had faced and mastered a seemingly desperate situation put her upon her mettle. He could see that she was trembling and on the point of breaking down—this brave girl, with the streaming dark hair; one stray lock had actually lashed him across the face—it was soft as a skein of silk and sweet as violets.

"I beg your pardon," she faltered, gathering it up; "I had no hands before. As for my hat, it is in some bog-hole."

"Your hands," he exclaimed, "are skinned, and in a shocking state; I *am* sorry."

"Oh, they are not so bad. The reins sawed them a good deal, and, unfortunately, I had just taken off my gloves."

"How did it happen?" he enquired.

In a few words she related the episode of the missing guard, the coachman's descent, and the catastrophe.

"So it was all the fault of an umbrella! I believe more unpleasantness has been caused by umbrellas than by any other portable article. They invite theft. Their loan, loss, or exchange

separates chief friends and rouses evil passions, but this is the first time I ever heard of an umbrella nearly upsetting a coach."

He rattled on in order to give her time to recover herself, as he entertained a high respect for her splendid courage and self-control.

"Tom Sweeny, the driver, will be nearly out of his mind—coach, horses, and passengers all gone, and he left to trudge back to Carra with the news of his loss. I think I see the manager's face!"

"I suppose he will be furious, though really the coachman was not to blame."

"I don't know that. Tom is too happy-go-lucky. He has no business to let his guard run messages. By-the-by, I thought there was a man on the box seat."

"Yes, a shameless, abject coward! He was so frightened, he let go the reins and I had the greatest difficulty in hooking them up. When I did at last get a pull at the top of the hill, and begged him to hurry down and put on the drag, he flatly refused."

"And so you chucked him off the coach?"

"I ordered him off,—and he was only too pleased to go."

The stranger laughed heartily, and then resumed—

"He is like the Irishman who said it was better to be a coward for ten minutes, than dead all his life! It was lucky you were to the fore. It is not the first time you have handled the ribbons; where did you learn?"

"In Australia, long ago—I used now and then to drive a team for fun."

"And to-day you drove a team in deadly earnest; it was a close shave coming down the long hill."

"Yes; it was nearly a case of number seven for us all. Oh, you don't understand Colonial slang, and I thought I'd forgotten it."

"Have you been long in England?"

"Since my father's death—five years last May. By the way, have you ever been in the Colonies?"

"Only in India. I say, hadn't you better tie your handkerchief over your head?"

"I would if I could find it; it has gone after my hat."

"May I offer mine?" and he pulled out a clean white silk one, which she accepted, unfolded, and, having gathered up her hair, knotted over her head Irish-peasant style, and mightily it became her.

"Here we are at the Devil's Elbow," he

explained, as they went slowly round a sharp corner overlooking a deep ravine. "And that is the celebrated river Leam; full of salmon, but shamelessly poached."

"Is it?—and how?"

"At night, with torches, spears, and cross-nets; I've often met a fine cartload of fish going to the train in the early morning. Do you fish, or are you a mere tourist?"

"I really cannot say yet; my brother-in-law fishes, and I think we shall stay for two months. I expect to have a delightful time, judging by the delicious air and scenery."

"Not to speak of exciting adventures," he added. "Well, I hope you will enjoy yourself; but I warn you that it is generally the unexpected that happens over here. I'm sure, when you left the Junction this morning, you never dreamt that you would be driving the mail-coach. I wonder what other events will fall to your lot, and what you will think of us in two months' time?"

And now once more the cat lifted up his voice and wailed, a long-drawn-out lament.

"We have a black cat on board," explained Maureen, "and I've no doubt it is he who has brought us bad luck."

"Oh, far from it. A black cat in Ireland

stands for Fortune herself. By Jove! how that dog barks; whose is he?"

"He belongs to my sister; he barked like that all the time the horses were running away."

"Why didn't someone break his neck?"

"Oh, poor Taffy!"

"Better than having all your necks broken."

"I am sorry to see that you are not well-disposed to dogs."

"Pardon me, I am foolishly fond of them; a dog is my chief companion and friend."

Here he paused, as he carefully threaded their way through a herd of little black cattle, and Maureen inspected him furtively. He was a gentleman, and wore a brown tweed suit, leather leggings, and serviceable dog-skin gloves. He had a firm jaw, a fine profile, a masterful individuality; and if he had not been so almost irritatingly cool when he took over charge, she would have broken down and disgraced herself. She hoped that he was staying at Ballybay, and immediately despised herself for the hope.

"And what is your dog like?" she asked, after a short silence.

"Oh, a sort of white bull-terrier. He has white eyelashes, a whip tail, and is most

intelligent and faithful. All of him that is not jaw, is heart."

"Dear me, he sounds like a tadpole."

"He has a history, which is more than a tadpole can boast. He went on board a ship by mistake; and was carried off to South America for his pains. Coming home the crew were wrecked, and suffered awful privations. For days they lived on their cargo; yet, starving as they were, they spared the dog; need I say more?"

"No, impossible."

"After they landed, the man to whom he had attached himself died in hospital. The authorities did not know what to do with Lost, and so I took him, and he has been my chum for nearly three years."

"Lucky for him, I imagine. By the way, it was still more lucky for us that you happened to be walking on the mountains."

"Walking! Do you call that walking? I was running as hard as ever I could tear. I was on the other coach, and saw what might occur in case you did not get a pull at these horses, so I gave the reins to a friend of mine, a first-rate whip, cut across the hill, and caught you in the nick of time."

"And saved our lives! Oh, how can

we thank you?" she asked, with shining eyes. "What can I say?"

"Please don't say another word. I merely did my duty—in fact, my double duty. I am in the service of the company."

"And do you live at Ballybay?"

"Well, I sleep in Ballybay, if you call that living; and I spend my Sundays there, as a rule; but most of my time I am driving coaches—it is my trade," here he half turned his head, and looked at her steadily. "I'm only a coachman. Did you think I was a tourist, and a gentleman?" and again there was that little mocking look in his eyes.

Such had indeed been Miss D'Arcy's belief, and this brusque announcement came as an unexpected shock. All the same, she returned his look with a cool, stately glance, as she responded—

"I don't know about being a tourist—but I think you are a gentleman."

For half a second his grave, luminous eyes flashed into fire, his lip trembled oddly, but he merely flipped a fly off one of the wheelers, and laughed as he replied—

"Well, when you come to Ballybay you will soon discover that I am only Terence, the coachman. And there," pointing to a wide sweep of water, "is Ballybay at last."

After this announcement he became taciturn, and appeared to be entirely occupied with his horses. For more than two miles a sensitive silence, a strange pause, fell between him and Miss D'Arcy. He was thinking that, now this girl was informed of his real position, she would not care to pursue his acquaintance, and possibly considered that he had already far overstepped the bounds between the stable and the drawing-room, consequently he remained proudly dumb. Miss D'Arcy had also her own reflections. The appearance, manners, courage, and coolness of this notable coachman had stirred her imagination, awakened her curiosity—aye, and, what was worse, aroused her interest ! She was quick to note how all the car-drivers, and men with loads of sea-wrack and turf, had a pleasant nod or a gay greeting for this same Terence. She felt slightly in awe of him (no, perhaps awe was too big a word), for although it was for *her* to condescend to conversation, yet, since silence was written on his rather stern lips, her courage failed her, and soon they were spinning rapidly through the one long street of Ballybay, and up to the hotel, from whence a waiter, a long ladder, and a landlord issued forth to receive them.

CHAPTER VII

GOSSIP

"AND what sort of an ornament at all do ye call the wan in number twenty?" demanded Julia, the head chambermaid of "The Fly and Fish," as she stood on the first landing, with her hands on her hips, her eyes ablaze, and her breath coming in quick, short gasps.

Julia was a typical Kerry girl; black haired, black browed, of Juno-like proportions, and decidedly handsome. Lizzie, her coadjutor, a wiry little woman, with sharp features and foxy hair, shifted a pile of blankets in her arms, as she drawled—

"An' sure, how would *I* know? What ails her?"

"'Tis Lady Fanshawe; she's as full of tricks as a rabbit, as vain as a paycock, and as onaisy as a hen on a hot griddle. First of all she came off the coach wid a terrible trembling and

wakeness, and then she wanted Sal-what-ye-may-call ; after that a cup of tay, and to look sharp. Well, that was well and good and in raisin. But what do ye say to a hot bath at five o'clock in the afternoon ? ”

And Julia paused dramatically.

“ Next the letters, the day's papers, and a few biscuits for the dog. The last trifle was a wardrobe—no less ! ”

“ An' hasn't she a grand one in number twenty ? ”

“ Not half grand enough to hould her clothes. Well, I put it to her that we were greatly knocked about just now, so throng we didn't know where to turn ; but she wouldn't take no. 'Twas all no manner of good. She said as much as she wouldn't ate or slape, till her clothes was shook out. So Jimmy Brennan and I had to go and root for the ould blue press in the far loft, which same nearly bruk our necks—I'm not the better of it yet. I declare, I never got such a scalding in my life ! ”

“ Them sort of grand ladies are just a pure torment,” said Lizzie. “ What brings the likes of them fishing at all at all ? ”

“ To give trouble, first and foremost, and after that, to kape their eye on the *men*. Sir Greville is a nice gentleman, as never gives no

sort of bother ; wance he has his breakfast, ye get shut av him for the day. But I'm thinking he has *her* destroyed wid petting. Anyway, from what I can see, he'll have plenty to do now, besides fishing with number forty."

"Ye mane the little leathery widow, Mrs. Duckitt?"

Julia nodded.

"Well, the wife is mortal handsome, wid her gowlden red hair and white skin."

"I'll lay me life they are both painted," returned Julia, with considerable heat.

"Ah, not at all, woman! I passed her close by on the stairs, and took real good stock of her and her dress. Faix, I got a great style of it; I'll make Bridgie Behan come in and take it in her eye, and make me new flannelette the very spit ov it."

"Balderdash! Bridgie is 'cute enough, but she'd never fit *that* in her eye. It cost pounds and pounds, maybe five pounds." If Julia had added twenty, she would not have been wide of the mark.

"There's another lady in number twenty-four," observed Lizzie; "mighty fine too."

"Lady how are ye! That's the maid in charge of the dog and diamonds. Her gown is lined with rustling silk. I suppose she

dursent show it outside, and bedad *she* wasn't at the back of the door when the noses was giv' out!"

"That's true for you, she's no beauty."

"The young slip in number twenty-six is a nice quiet girl; she lost her hat, and was greatly tossed about on the coach. They are putting out a lot of talk in the yard as how Tom Sweeny was took wid a fit, and fell off the box, and *she* drov' it."

"Well, that's not true; an' it's like their *talk*. I seen Terence on the box alongside of her when the coach come up. I was in the lobby window, and, bedad, she wasn't long in making friends with the handsome coachman, for she giv' me a bit of a note and a parcel for him just now."

Julia straightened herself to her full majestic height, and said—

"Now, just keep yer long tongue quiet, Lizzie Lynch, and lave that young girl alone; none of yer scandalous stories. That wan is a real lady, wid a nice low way of asking for things—and the manners of a duchess. *She's* none of yer brazen lumps; and thinks a dale too much av herself to make free wid the likes of a strange coachman—though I'm not saying he isn't a dacent quiet boy, and gives

the MacGills as much work about his shirts and his bath as if he were a real gentleman."

"Have it yer own way, Julia, agra. What's the use of talking? I give the parcel into MacGills' with me own two hands. Did ye never hear as 'still waters run deep'?"

"Well, after that, I'll not believe me own senses, an' all I can say——"

Here a bell rang violently.

"It's number twenty, bad cess to it! I don't know what she can be wanting now; but there's wan thing she'll certainly *get*, and that's a piece of me mind," cried Julia, as she hurried away down the passage.

CHAPTER VIII

VALUABLE INFORMATION

Miss D'ARCY had been compelled to devote some time to her sister, whose nerves were all but wrecked by her recent experience on the coach. But when Lady Fanshawe, invested in a loose silk tea-gown, was settled on the sofa, with a down pillow at her back and a novel in her hand, her relative was at last released. Maureen gladly hurried away to change her dress and unpack her boxes, and presently bethought herself of the borrowed handkerchief. This she examined with considerable curiosity; it was of good white silk, smelt faintly of tobacco, and exhibited in one corner a sprawling "T," proof positive that "T" had no female belongings. "T's" property she carefully folded, and placed it in an envelope with a sheet of paper, on which she wrote, "With M. D'Arcy's best thanks," and having summoned Lizzie, and enquired "if she knew

where Terence, the coachman, lived?" requested her to despatch the packet at once—little dreaming of the construction that her scandal-loving emissary would place upon the errand.

Lady Fanshawe dined in her own sitting-room, but Sir Greville and his sister-in-law duly appeared at the *table d'hôte*, where he was cordially hailed by numerous acquaintances. The company numbered about forty, and Sir Greville pointed out to Maureen the three brothers from Leeds, the old General and his daughter, the family from Birmingham, father, mother, and sons, all equally keen, and last, but not least, Mrs. Duckitt, whom he had known for some years—a particularly nice little woman—and he hoped that she and Maureen, and of course Nita, would be kindred spirits. Maureen, who was deeply interested in her surroundings, looked over to where the "little woman" sat, some way down on the opposite side of the table. She saw a slight, bright-eyed lady, with well-dressed hair and a smart pink blouse. Her complexion was tanned to a light warm mahogany—a shade which set off her brilliant teeth with such remarkable effect that they seemed to be the most striking feature in her animated countenance.

Mrs. Duckitt appeared to divine that she was being discussed, for she accorded Sir Greville a merry little nod—a nod which savoured of pleasant intimacy and happy memories.

“You two must have a talk after dinner,” he said. “She will tell you about the place. She’s as good as a guide-book ; knows all the boatmen, and most of the people round for miles.”

“Does she come here quite alone ?”

“Oh, yes. She is perfectly independent. I don’t know anyone more so than a rich, childless, middle-aged widow. She has a maid somewhere about, who must have a precious easy time, as Mrs. Duckitt goes off early, and never returns till seven o’clock, or later. She’s one of those persistent women who never say die.”

“Perhaps the fish echo her sentiments,” retorted Maureen, with a mischievous smile, “and refuse to say die either.”

After dinner the company dispersed. Some sat in the hall and judged the day’s fishing (here laid out for inspection and criticism) ; some repaired to the drawing-room ; others sought the verandah, whilst a few sauntered down the road. These latter included Mrs. Duckitt, who had taken Miss D’Arcy under her capable wing. As for Sir Greville, he had

been eagerly laid hold of by some old associates, and was deep in poaching.

"Let us walk down to the bridge," suggested Mrs. Duckitt. "Never mind your hat—we are not in Hyde Park here."

"No, indeed," rejoined Maureen, gazing at the wide bay, the heather-mantled moors, and towering mountains, whose dark headlands dropped sheer into the sea.

"I can promise you a capital view from the bridge."

"I hear 'the bridge' so much referred to; is it very remarkable?" asked the girl. "A bridge of boats, or a bridge of sighs?"

"No, it merely spans the little river which connects Lough Verane with the bay. It is a delightfully dreamy place, where you lean your elbows on the parapet, and wear out your best sleeves. Everyone drifts there to contemplate, conspire, gossip, or flirt. It is not, as you might imagine, modestly secluded, but boldly situated on the bare, brazen coaching road."

All the same, the bridge was a most picturesque spot. The clear, shallow river babbled to itself beneath its arches as it hurried from stately Lough Verane to the thankless sea. On one side its banks were heavily shaded by

trees, under which many boats and canoes were moored ; the opposite shore was low. As Maureen looked, she noticed two girls drawing water in a barrel, and a small boy fishing sedately with a crooked pin. There were at least half-a-dozen people resting their elbows on the bridge : three anglers, scheming in whispers ; a young couple from one of the hotels murmuring honeymoon vows ; and close to Mrs. Duckitt stood a tall old man wearing a grey moustache, and three war medals pinned to his homespun waistcoat.

"It is Pat the Pensioner," she explained. "I must introduce you. You will find him worth knowing. Well, Pat, how are you?"

"Finely, ma'am," saluting as he spoke.

"This is Sir Greville's sister-in-law, come to see how she will like Ballybay."

"You are kindly welcome, miss ; and as for Ballybay, it's the wholesomest place ye ever put the sole of your foot in. Axing your pardon, miss, isn't thon an Indian thing?" pointing to a painted brooch, set in filigree, which she wore.

"Yes, it was sent to me by a schoolfellow ; it came from Delhi."

"Delhi !" and his eyes flashed, "and well I know it."

"Do you indeed?"

"Sure, wasn't I there in the Mutiny?"

"Were you?—I notice you have three medals."

"I have so, and I was recommended for the 'Cross' as well."

"I would like so much to hear how you gained them."

"So she shall, another time," interrupted Mrs. Duckitt, hastily taking Maureen by the arm. "But we must be going back now, Pat." Then to her companion, "There is to be some good music this evening; we should not miss it."

"I feel far more inclined to stay out here and enjoy the sea and mountain air, not to speak of the moonlit scene."

"Plenty of time to do all that, but once old Pat got hold of you, you'd stay an hour; and Mrs. Borlase has a divine voice—the tall lady in the pale green dress who sat in the hall. Did you notice her?"

"Yes. Does she fish?"

"Oh, dear, no. We are divided here into three classes: The *bonâ fide* anglers, who fish conscientiously all day, such as myself, Sir Greville, and the Leeds people; the impostors, who pretend that they are fishing, but really picnic round the lakes and rivers and explore the country; lastly, the visitors, who simply

bathe, go excursions, play tennis, golf, and dance, if they get the chance. Of course, I don't count the tourists who just rush through on the coaches. Now, I wonder to which set you and your sister will belong?"

"I believe we shall both be impostors," rejoined Maureen, with a smile, "or *I* shall be an impostor, and Nita a visitor, for I am longing to see more of this beautiful wild scenery."

"Perhaps you may develop into a fisherwoman—you never know."

"I may; *you* are very keen, I believe?"

"Yes, my husband was an ardent angler, and I caught the fever from him. We used to go to Norway, and, better still, Sweden; but they are too far afield for a lone woman, so I come here instead. Your brother and I are great pals—he has been very kind to me. I like him immensely."

"Oh, I am so glad; most people like Greville."

"You see, we have the same ideas about flies, we don't mind rough weather, and we possess about an equal stock of patience. I know he wants you to fish, so I'll give you some tips, shall I?"

"Thank you. It will be very good of you to enlighten me."

"Then I shall begin at once. No time like the present, is there? In the first place, you should start in the morning about nine o'clock, as there is more likelihood of finding the fish on the rise. They do not feed the whole day as a rule, only for an hour or two, so your best chance is to keep on casting all the time until you hit off the rise. This, of course, requires a great amount of perseverance, and some get sick of it after a while, and go home disgusted."

Maureen nodded a ready assent.

"Then," continued Mrs. Duckitt, as she took her new friend's arm, "your rod should be ten feet, and, of course, you are aware that you will want a couple of trolling rods too. They must be at least fourteen feet."

To this the hypocrite, who had never even heard of "trolling," bowed her head affirmatively.

"Your book of flies is *most* important, and should contain claret and blue, claret and olive, olive and blue, claret and grouse, Zulu, golden olive, claret and mallard, hare's ear, and woodcock wing. If none of these will rise a fish, nothing will, and you will have to fall to trolling with two Devon minnows and a small spoon-bait."

"It appears to be very hard work."

"Oh, nothing when you're used to it ; besides, it's not work, but pleasure. Now I'll tell you the best reaches. Early in the season, Rabbie Island and Chapel Island ; later on, the mouths of the rivers Commeragh and Coppal are much sought, for the fish are on their way to the upper lakes. As there is only room for one or two drifts, it is first come, first served. If you have the luck to have a nice east wind, eighteen to twenty sea-trout is a 'good basket,' and maybe a salmon ; I'd call that a fair day."

"So I should think," exclaimed her listener.

"Of course, if you want a sensational take, one of the upper lakes, such as Loch Na Nisky in a west wind, is *the* place for you. Now I've told you a dead, dead secret, just as if you were my own sister. Ah ! and here comes Sir Greville at last."

"Well, Mrs. Duckitt, so we meet again, you see. What have you been putting into Maureen's head ?" he asked, as he turned and walked back beside her.

"I've been imparting various profound secrets to Miss D'Arcy, and some day, if she is very, very good, I'll allow her to see my fly-book."

"That will be a favour," he exclaimed ; "you've never accorded that privilege to me."

"No, I have a crow to pick with you just now.

Ah! there are the Palisers," nodding to a passing group. "I suppose at their old quarters? What numbers of people are out this evening!"

"But about this dead crow?"

"I find that you have bespoken my boatmen, —Judge and Joe."

"Yes, I was an early crow, and you had them last year. Turn about is fair play!"

"They are quite the best fishermen on the lakes. I've been obliged to fall back on the Foggartys."

"You might do worse. Young Matt is a capital fellow, and you will find him rather a character."

"Not half such a character as the old Judge with his legends and fairy tales and enchantments, in all of which he steadfastly believes."

"No? Still, Matt is not half bad in his line. Of course, *you* know how we all ignore brown trout, though one could easily catch four or five dozen; and one day last year, not having had a rise for hours, I was going to keep a 'brownie,' when Matt called out, 'For shame, sor! But begorra I'll tell you what you'll do wid him. Have you a tinte of whisky in your flask? If so, put it in his mouth and throw him out again.' I did as advised, and I declare

to you the very next cast I was in a fine fish! 'Didn't I tell ye so?' said Matt. 'Sure he is like the rest of us, fond of a drop, and he has gone and told all the others!' It certainly looked like it, for I had capital sport all that day."

Mrs. Duckitt laughed, and said, "Well, now *I'll* know what to try when the fish are taking short!"

As the trio came nearer to the hotel, the strains of a piano, and a rich, full contralto, singing "Love's Young Dream," came floating from the drawing-room windows.

"Look, there is Terence, the coachman, with his white dog, sitting on the wall!" exclaimed Mrs. Duckitt.

"He is an imperturbable young man—so silent, and unlike his class. He keeps aloof from the townspeople, and is considered very stand-off and dark in himself. But in Ireland everything is forgiven to one who is a born ruler of horses."

"Yes, I have a slight acquaintance with Terence," rejoined Sir Greville. "He is a fine young fellow. His daring, physical strength, and great determination are precisely the qualities which delight the natives, and impress their imagination."

"I notice that when there is any open-window music he invariably appears and sits there on the wall," continued Mrs. Duckitt; and as she passed she gave him a friendly little nod, and Maureen bowed—which salutations their recipient acknowledged by gravely touching his straw hat.

CHAPTER IX

A LOST DAY

A soft inviting wind, and a cloudless sky of her favourite colour, welcomed Lady Fanshawe to Ballybay, and she graciously expressed her intention of accompanying her husband on the lake the morning after their arrival. The hall appeared to be filled with an animated crowd as she slowly descended the stairs—thronged with people clamouring for their luncheon baskets, hunting up wraps, fishing-tackle, and umbrellas. Some were about to drive to the river, some were going sight-seeing, some merely to bathe. Outside the hotel the verandah was lined by boatmen awaiting their employers, and beyond these was a row of cars and waggonettes.

Great as was the flurry and haste incidental to a general start, yet no one was too occupied to fail to notice the lovely apparition who followed Sir Greville Fanshawe. Even Mrs.

Duckitt paused, with a bit of gut between her teeth, and gazed in spellbound admiration. She beheld a wealth of dark copper-coloured hair, a rose-leaf complexion, a pair of lovely eyes that seemed to say "Forget-me-not," and a radiant personality. Altogether, Lady Fanshawe's appearance was a notable event, as well as a general surprise. Her conception of a costume suitable for lake fishing was as peculiar as it was becoming—a white serge coat and skirt, with pale blue satin vest, white gloves, white canvas shoes, and a white feather boa; in fact, the only hint of boating was conveyed by a jaunty little sailor hat. This brilliant vision was promptly introduced to several of her husband's much-impressed acquaintances, including Mrs. Duckitt, whose weather-beaten face, brief waterproof skirts, thick sea boots afforded a violent contrast to the elegant new arrival.

"I've been giving your husband such a scolding, Lady Fanshawe," she said with a smile, "though now *you* are here I must be on my 'P's and Q's.' He has been too previous, and has engaged my pet boatmen."

"Fancy having a pet boatman!" echoed Lady Fanshawe, with a rather scornful little laugh.

"I only mean that they are the most efficient pair," rejoined the little widow, good-temperedly. "I'm so glad you are going on the lake; it's a perfect morning; but you really ought to make a start at once, as you may lose a good drift."

"Oh, we are not going till the post comes. I never can do anything till I get my letters."

"You are not serious!" in a tone of incredulity. "Then, you *will* be late. Well, I'm off to the upper lakes, and have no time to lose. *Au revoir*; see you all at dinner!" and so saying Mrs. Duckitt waved a mahogany-coloured hand, sprang on a car, and was whirled away.

"And so that is the wonderful Mrs. Duckitt!" exclaimed Nita. "What a complexion—and *what* boots! I'm so sorry to keep you, Grev, but I'll go the moment I get my mail; we must, of course, take dear Taffy."

"Dear Taffy is no catch on a coach, I must say. I hope he will behave better on the water. Mind you, I'll not be responsible for him."

"Oh no, dearest; he can take good care of himself. We shall be 'three in a boat, to say nothing of the dog'; won't that be nice?"

It was half-past ten when Sir Greville and his two ladies made a start, preceded by the boatmen (Joe and the Judge), who trudged stolidly

before them, carrying lunch and tackle, and grumbling to one another (in Irish) at pet dogs, fine ladies, and their small chance of good sport. They showed the way first over the hill, down among some boggy tussocks which sucked off one of Nita's pretty shoes, across two or three stone walls, which smirched the freshness of her pretty white gown, till at last they came in full sight of long, irregular Lough Verane, sternly guarded by a line of mountains.

"What are these boatmen like, Grevy?" asked Maureen. Her sister followed erratically—she was reading her letters.

"Capital fellows; tremendously keen; most of them walk miles from their homes up in the glens to pull a boat all day. They are very successful fishermen, and devoted to sport, whether on land, lake, or sea. Many of them own a well-bred beagle or two, for there is a renowned pack in this part of the world—the best in Kerry. They meet every Sunday at the Chapel Cross, have long and exciting runs over hill and dale, and are hunted by an active lad, who is generally barefoot."

"How I should like to go out with the beagles!" exclaimed Maureen.

"My dear child!" cried Nita, who had overheard the latter part of this conversation, "I

am perfectly certain you would, and bareheaded and barefooted to boot. No, I never make puns—that was an accident ; you always enjoy the most outlandish things.”

By this time they had reached the end of their walk, and stood and gazed on Lough Verane, which looked impressively grand, its shining waters reflecting their guard of purple mountains, and rugged islands with their ruins and cattle ; around the shores were rocks, boggy morasses, rushes, and water-lilies ; farther up, heather, gorse, and great fuchsias ; whilst on the lower slopes of the hills were scattered flocks and herds. It was a wild, lonely, lovely scene. The dip of an oar, the bleating of a sheep, the crowing of a grouse alone broke the silence, whilst the grey walls of an ancient monastery indicated that even a thousand years ago holy men had here found a haven of saintly repose ; and still on the mountains, the islands, and the lake, prevailed an atmosphere of majestic peace.

As the “Judge,” a stern-eyed, bearded old man, pushed off into deep water, he cast an envious glance afar.

“I just suspicioned how it would be ! Every drift is taken, and there isn’t a hole or a corner for us.”

"But the lake is said to be eighteen miles in circumference," argued Nita.

"But there are only a dozen good spots," rejoined the Judge, with a look of pity for her ignorance. "I suppose I'll try Chapel Island, sor?"

"Just as you please, Judge," assented Sir Greville, good-humouredly. "What sort of a day is it going to be?"

"Bedad, the sky has a greasy look and isn't to be trusted—it's never to be relied on now; but what can ye expect, since the year forty-seven, when we lost the sun, and the boys and girls left the country, and the trout and salmond left the rivers, and the land refused the crops. But it's all the governor's doing," he groaned, "the master's will; and *I'll* never be wan to go agin him, and use potato spray!"

"I see you are a fatalist," observed Maureen, with a smile.

"If that's a new word for a good Papist, I am so, miss. Did ye hear that Mrs. Duckitt went off to the Beriana Lake, sir? Oh, she's a great one, and stands up in her boat like a man! She was dead set on getting *me*, and terribly disappointed; but I said that, as you and she were always so thick, maybe you'd go shares wid her—if her ladyship was

not hot on the fishing ; and sure I see she never had a rod in her hand till this day."

"What do you mean by thick ?" asked her ladyship, suddenly entangling her line in her sister's.

"Being real friendly—good comrades. Do ye mind the day, sor, you and she were after the big salmond at the mouth of the Coppal, and never got home till eleven at night ?"

"Of course I do ; we got two grand fish. Mine weighed twenty-two pounds. Such a day is not easily forgotten !"

"I suppose you know the lake well ?" asked Lady Fanshawe, as she gazed over the long expanse, now resembling a silver mirror.

"Yes ; I've been on it since I was two year old, and I know every sup of water in it, and every wan of its tricks—and they are many."

"Was any one ever lost on it ?"

"No, I can't rightly remember as they wor, mam—we generally find the bodies."

"I mean drowned," she exclaimed, now jerking all her flies into the back of her husband's coat.

After this *contretemps* was repaired (which proved to be a business of time), the Judge continued : "Oh, as for drowning, there's a power o' people loses their lives in this lough. Sure,

isn't it enchanted, as well as all the country round for miles?"

"Not really?"

"'Tis truth I'm telling you. Augh! there's many a quare tale about these parts."

"Do please tell us some," urged Maureen. "I *love* stories."

"Well, then"—now resting for a moment on his oars—"first and foremost, I'll tell ye how it come to be a lake at all. Long ago there was a fairy well beyant on the far side. There was a spell over it, and it bid to be covered at sundown. Every wan round made use of the spring for years and years, till one day a young girl, as it might be yourself, went for water, and got thinking of her lover, and teetotally forgot all about the *lid*. Well, bedad, sunset came, and the water rose, and rose, and rose, till it overflowed the country for miles, and never stopped till it had made this lough the size it is now, but which all the time came out of a fairy well; and it's fairy water still."

He paused, and Maureen nodded, and said "Some more, please; do go on; I like to hear about the lake."

"There's a sea-horse in it; I've seen him neself three time. He generally comes before some heavy trouble. He is about twice as long

as the boat, and has a mane as high as wan of the oars. Begorra, when I come on him, I felt the flesh creepin' off me bones, and I declare——" Here Taffy, who had been gazing intently over the bow of the boat, made a violent diversion by tumbling into the water, and it took a considerable time to catch and haul him in—most anxious to enact the part of watering-pot to his friends, and delighted with his adventure. "Dogs has no call to be boatin'," growled the Judge, scowling at Lady Fanshawe from under his pent brows. "They are best at home—like others."

"I quite agree with you, Judge," replied Maureen. "Now, do please tell me another story, for I know you can talk and row."

"Then, miss, since you are so detarmined, I'll tell you wan or two that's Bible truth. There's a grand treasure buried in wan of the small bays; a man who was cutting reeds found it, but left it where it was, being a terrible miser, and in dread that his family would drink it out of him. He died speechless, and sorra a wan knows where it is to this day; but it's there—the monk's gold! Then, on wan of the other lakes, there's a quare little island that moves round on wan day in the year, and crowds does go to see it; but a soldier man

jeered and laughed and threw his sword at it. Bedad, he had no luck from that out; but it's the born truth, that ever since then the island has gone with a *limp!*"

This statement was succeeded by a long, dead, and incredulous silence. "There, ye see them tall stones like steeples, over that hill beyant?"

Maureen looked, and nodded assent.

"There is something not right as does be thereabouts at night; Timothy the Thatcher seen it wance, and nearly died of it. Oh, there's a power of fairies and night-workers round here."

"And what is that old grey house on the point?" asked Lady Fanshawe. "Has it no history? Who lives there?"

"Ne'er a wan now. There are quare stories about it too; and that on All Souls' Eve it has a blazing light in every window. But I never seen nothing meself. It belonged to a real grand stock wance. Faix, it is a lonesome enough spot now, and sometimes when a black storm from the mountains turns the lake purple, and gives it a terrible appearance, a wind goes screaming through the empty rooms that would make your heart tremble. It's the spirit of the ancient family, wailing for the cold hearth and the lost race."

"I suppose it was an Irish family?"

"Av course—and what else?" he demanded, with withering contempt, and the old blue eyes flashed from beneath their shaggy brows.

"I notice that you all speak Irish. Will you say something in Irish? I'd like to hear it."

"'Cionnas ta' tu';' that means 'Good-day.' 'Tabhair dham pog, caili'n o'g;' that means 'Give me a kiss, you pretty girl.'"

"It sounds nice and soft."

"Aye, it's nice enough—and soft, too, but it's dying out. They took our language, and sure every country is left *that*. They took the language of the three kingdoms, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, and silenced them."

"Who did?"

"Why, the English—and who else?" he retorted fiercely.

"I suppose you don't care for them?"

"Bedad, I've seen people as I like better, though some are not too faulty. Me lady, yer flies are stuck in the lunch basket—the whole cast—so, av ye wish to land and ate a bit, you've only to say the word."

"But it's barely twelve o'clock," objected Sir Greville, who had not had a single rise.

"Then we'd better get out the irons, sir"



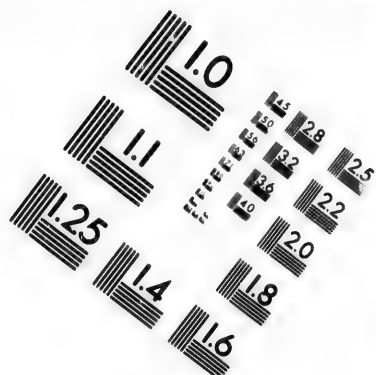
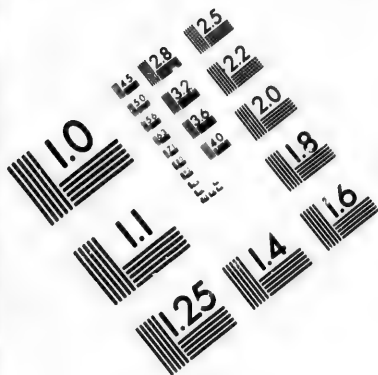
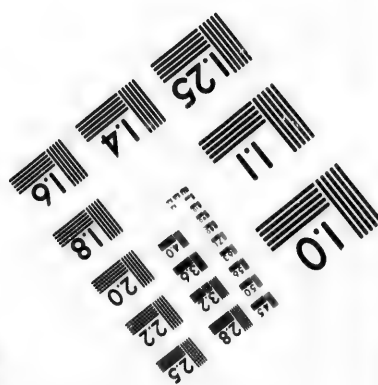
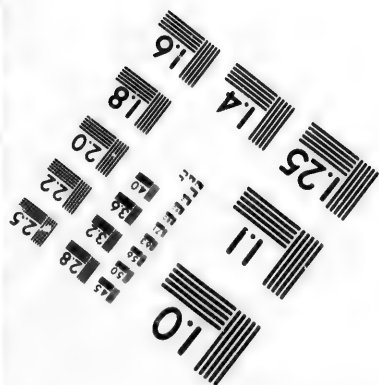
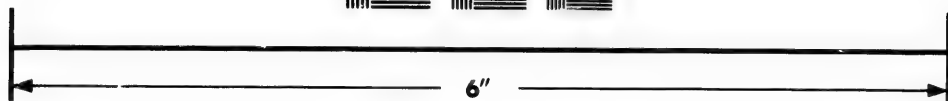
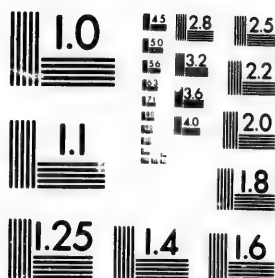


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(meaning the trolling rods), "for I don't think we will have much luck *this* day."

At one o'clock the boat-load had landed on an island for refreshment. Here Sir Greville and his ladies partook of sandwiches and claret under one rock, the boatmen sandwiches and beer under another, whilst Taffy hunted rats till he was thoroughly dry. After lunch, Maureen rambled round, interested in all she saw—the ivy-clad old ruins, and strange and ancient tombstones. At the end of this lazy hour the party once more embarked, this time to try their luck off Grassy Island. They passed various boats, exchanging news and cheery greetings, and eventually came to a good "drift"; but what with a repetition of "dog overboard," and Lady Fanshawe's cast, which was everywhere but in the water, there was no improvement in their fortunes, and Sir Greville began to look glum, and the Judge's brows were ominously knit, his wrinkled visage became surly, and his very beard assumed a scornful curve.

Maureen, who had long laid aside her fishing rod, made desperate attempts to rally his spirits, and said—

"Now, do tell me, Judge, what was the largest fish you ever caught?"

"Well then, miss, I'll tell ye, an' it wasn't so much what *I* caught, as what caught *me*. I was poaching in the Coppal, and I'll not deny it, for the fish is for the *poor*, and 'tis the gentry as is the raal poachers. I landed ten fine salmond, and lost nigh as many, when all at wance I was into something terribly heavy, so I hauled, and I hauled, and at long last out leaped a great conger eel! Faith, the serpent in the Garden of Aden was a worm to him! He made for me at wance, as bould as a lion, and twisted himself tight round and round me body; he had a mouth on him like an open door, and, begad, I was took with a strong weakness, and I roared for Joe to get the gaff and break his head. But sure there was another mouth on the top of that! Faix, I thought he'd get the better of me, and ate me down to the boots! But Joe and I at long last got shut av him—in pieces; I declare to ye the bank was like a butcher's shop—I was all of a tremble for weeks, and I never could look at an eel since."

"Grevy," interposed his wife, in a piteous voice, "I am so cramped, my petticoats are drenched, and my line is entangled again; do land me, and let me walk home."

"But, my dear, I've just got a rise at last. We

are in the good part, and it's six miles to walk back, if I do land you. What do *you* say, Maureen ?”

“Oh, I'm enjoying this lovely view and air immensely.”

“Air which has taken every bit of curl out of my boa, not to speak of my fringe. Grevy, dear, it will only take you an hour. Do put us ashore, as close as ever you can to the hotel. Why, look at my poor dear shoes !” and she held up a small soaking foot. “I'll catch my death, and how will you like *that* ?”

“We are in the very best drift now, me lady, and the rise on. Surely to goodness you wouldn't deny the master his sport ?” demanded the Judge, with judicial solemnity.

“Sport to him ; death to me ! Grevy, darling, I *must* get out of this *galère*,” and Nita, who really was “destroyed with petting,” carried her point as usual, and the two unappreciative fisherwomen were duly put ashore. As they trudged along the road which lay between lake and mountain, the elder exclaimed—

“I fully agree with Dulcie Flashe. I see nothing in fishing beyond danger, discomfort, and misery. What do you say, Moll ?”

“It is rather exciting, I dare say, but I feel so sorry for the poor fish ; I hate to see them

drawn out of their element all fluttering and gasping."

"Let us walk up to those haunted stones," suggested the other; "they are no distance, and it will be something to talk about at dinner instead of flies, and takes, and trout; there is sure to be a grand view."

In five minutes' time the two sisters stood upon the summit of a closely cropped hill, on which were seven high stones, surrounded by a tumble-down wall. From this eminence they beheld a truly magnificent prospect of lake and sea; the horizon, on all sides but the south, being hemmed in by mountains; on the south lay the restless Atlantic—what a contrast to its neighbour, the silent, secluded lake!

"These stones must be druidical," said Maureen, inspecting them with interest; "Stonehenge on a small scale. I wonder where they came from, and how they were raised, and——"

"Oh, there goes the coach just below," interrupted Nita. "It is crossing the bridge. I wonder if it is bringing any nice people to our hotel? Come along at once. I'm dying for dry stockings and my afternoon tea."

* * * * *

As Lady Fanshawe and her sister, followed by the dog, gradually dwindled from view, the

Judge, bending to long strokes of his oar, gave vent to a grunt of unchivalrous relief, and grumbled out :

"I think yer honor might as well 'ave left me wid Mrs. Duckitt, for sure any fool can take ye out picnicking wid two ladies and a lap-dog."

"The ladies won't come out often, Judge."

"Ov course, that will be as *they* plase," he answered, inflexibly. "But your honor must allow that we are well shut of the womenkind, and that this has been a lost day."

CHAPTER X

JEALOUSY

THE weather was perfect ; the fishing proved phenomenally good ; Sir Greville enjoyed his favourite sport to his heart's content, and every morning, to the unconcealed satisfaction of the Judge, started off alone. Meanwhile, his wife and her sister spent the flying hours each in accordance with her own devices. Lady Fanshawe was immediately enrolled as one of the most popular of the "visitor set." She joined eagerly in tennis, picnics, golf and games. She made great friends with a Mrs. Larkins—another pretty woman who also abhorred fishing—arranged her private sitting-room with silk cushions, photographs, drapery, branches of fuchsias and mountain ash (in lieu of palms), and quantities of flowers, hired a piano, and made her boudoir a sort of meeting-place and *salon*. It was a coveted favour to be invited

to one of Lady Fanshawe's merry teas, or to a little supper and card party, where everyone played bridge or poker till long after midnight. Lady Fanshawe also gave charming picnics; she got up a tennis tournament, a dance—in fact, she woke up the whole place, and drew visitors to her hotel; for her lovely face, charming toilettes, and lively tongue were quite a feature at the *table d'hôte*. An Irish barrister and two officers from Cork actually abandoned fishing in order to swell the court of the Fish Queen—so called because every evening, after dinner, when the day's take was spread out on heather in the hall, she occupied a high-backed armchair, and distributed blame, praise, and prizes (these were flowers).

"*She* the Queen of the Fish!" repeated Mrs. Duckitt, scornfully. "A woman that doesn't know a trout from a cod, or a salmon from a shark! If she's the Queen of the Fish, I'm the Queen of Beauty."

No, after all, Lady Fanshawe and Mrs. Duckitt did *not* assimilate; they had nothing in common; and how people would have laughed had any one ventured to whisper that the lovely Nita was furiously—though secretly—jealous of her husband's undisguised partiality for the weather-beaten little widow! Sir Greville had

never been a ladies' man; his submission to Nita was an unparalleled triumph. Since their marriage she had taken it as a matter of course that he should look on indulgently at her social triumphs, applaud her train of admirers, wait patiently in doorways, and generally furnish incense. But to see him now, abandoning her society for that of another woman, was a spectacle that filled her with indignation and dismay. He and the widow sat opposite to one another at table, and afterwards frequently adjourned to the verandah to confer solemnly over flies, or strolled down the road together to the tackle shop. No one would have guessed that each step and gesture were noted by the triumphant beauty enthroned within. Not one suspected the truth, though one or two people vaguely wondered "why they never saw Mrs. Duckitt at any of Lady Fanshawe's delightful functions." As for Maureen, she was frankly an impostor; she borrowed an old hunter, when he was not drawing a car—a well-bred, bony quadruped, with a mouth like iron, and an unabated passion for "lepping." Mounted on Redcoat she saw a good deal of the neighbourhood—she far preferred a saddle to a boat. Occasionally she explored on foot, walking miles with a few biscuits in her pocket, and Taffy for her sole

companion. They visited many an unfrequented spot, lonely little mountain lochs veiled in water-lilies ; quaint old Danish forts, garrisoned by sheep ; deserted villages up the glens, their ruined walls smothered in fuchsias ; whilst currant bushes and hoary apple trees indicated where gardens had once been, and were not. For the former owners, those who had planted these gardens, had died, or fled away over the seas in the bad times.

* * * * *

"Have you heard of the latest tragedy ?" asked Maureen, suddenly entering her sister's room (which was no bad imitation of a London boudoir).

"What, has old Fouché proposed to Mrs. Duckitt ?"

"No, no," with a laugh ; "but you remember that boy Norris, who has been so persevering and unlucky, and how he caught his first salmon yesterday, and you gave him a flower ?"

"To be sure, and he could hardly speak for emotion, and wired off the great news to all his relations, and is sending the fish to his *rich uncle*."

"There was some frightful blunder ; and when he went to get it packed, it turned out that we

had all had it for breakfast—and excellent it was! He is nearly crying, poor boy.”

“He should have wrapped it up in silver paper and taken it to his own room,” scoffed Lady Fanshawe. “By the way, Moll, where are you off to? I assure you your skin is nearly as brown as that woman’s” (she generally spoke of Mrs. Duckitt as “that woman”). “Why can’t you stay here quietly and play tennis and practise glees, instead of becoming like a wild girl of the woods?”

“I can play tennis and practise glees at any time in London. But it is only here that I can become a wild girl of the woods.”

“You’d rather tramp the country with Taffy, or ride that ancient animal who has a most depressing and woe-begone expression—I declare it makes me quite melancholy to look at him.”

“If you had to draw a car forty miles at a stretch, perhaps you would look melancholy too. I enjoy myself in one way, you in another. I like watching the country girls dancing at the cross, or rambling about the mountains, where I meet with amusing adventures, and great courtesy. I am entertained by real ladies and gentlemen, who offer me fresh milk and hot bread, and tell me all sorts of interesting things.”

"About what?" asked Nita, with a curling lip.

"Enchantments—smugglers—old families—and buried treasures."

"Buried grandmothers!"

"Do you know that in former times the fisher people across the bay used to sail to Spain, taking fish and wool, and bringing back wine and skins? One woman always went, and only one, because there was but one scarlet cloak in the whole townland, and they wore it in turn."

"Well if it had been my garment, I shouldn't have lent it. Fancy one's best and only cloak being used by all one's women friends, whenever they wanted to cut a dash in Spain! What are you going to do this afternoon? Come to the golf links."

"No, I want to go to see the old pensioner."

"Now, how can he possibly interest you? Do come and play in a set with Lord Fitz Loft, officer and gentleman, instead of wasting your time on private and pensioner."

"I prefer the other; I really can't stand young Fitz Loft's lofty airs."

"You are too self-effacing, and so simply dressed and silent, and fond of a back seat, that they all take you for a poor relation, and *my* pensioner."

"So much the better. If it ever leaks out that I am a 'nugget'—a great heiress—I warn you I shall either run away or shut myself up in my room. Remember your promise."

"Yes, luckily none of our London friends are here to label you 'Precious goods.'"

"No; they have not discovered this paradise; and at any rate the place is full enough. By the way, there is such a scrimmage for boats that Grev has been obliged to go shares with Mrs. Duckitt. Did he tell you?"

Lady Fanshawe, who was lying at full length on the sofa, complacently admiring her shoes, suddenly sprang up, her face scarlet.

"Nonsense!" she screamed. "I won't have it, and I shall tell her so!"

"But, my dear Nita, it is all settled. Grevy never dreamt that you would mind. You don't fish yourself; and surely you would not be such a dog in the manger, or dog in the boat, as to refuse your place to another?"

"It's perfectly preposterous the way he hobnobs with that woman. I'm sure people notice it. She is a most appalling person. I can't think what Grevy sees in her."

"She ties the most exquisite flies, and is an enthusiast, like himself. 'Birds of a feather,' you know," rejoined Maureen.

"A bird of prey, *I* call her."

"My dear Nita," contemplating her with serious eyes, "what have you got into your head? For my part, I like Mrs. Duckitt; she is a charming, frank, pleasant companion—I only wish I could see more of her—and full of enterprise and go."

"She is a torpedo-boat in petticoats, and I wish she *would* go. Well, if you really intend to prowl about the country, you may as well take Taff—he is a horrid nuisance on the links, fetching balls, or getting stuck in rabbit holes."

"I'm rather inclined to think he is a horrid nuisance everywhere. He has killed two cats and four chickens during our rambles, and got me into frightful scrapes. However, I suppose I had better take him," rejoined Maureen, as she opened the door. "Don't expect us till you see us. Come along, Taffy."

CHAPTER XI

TOBACCO AND TALK

RYAN, the pensioner, lived close to a deserted water-mill in a picturesque hollow, not far from the bridge. On a fine day he was often to be seen sunning himself on a little knoll above his dwelling. He was sitting there with a white dog for his sole companion when Miss D'Arcy joined him.

"There is no fear of Lost, *he* is not a manecur," explained Ryan, as he rose, and saluted the visitor; "no matter how tantalizing they does be, he never fights wid one smaller nor himself."

"Then he is a animal with a high sense of honour! Is he yours?" she asked.

"Faix, no, miss, he belongs to Terence, the coachman; but you see he is mostly driving all day, and the dog is left at home alone, wearing his heart out. I declare it's melancholy to

see a dumb baste that wrapped up in a human creature. He will go without food and drink, and run twenty mile for a sight of his master, and then to watch them eyes of his, following him with such a loving gaze, that it turns to tears! Still, it's not worse for a dog to waste his little life on a man, than for a man to waste his love on a woman." Here Ryan nodded his head solemnly, and with an air that implied a melancholy experience.

"Bedad, dogs has good hearts, I can tell ye," he ejaculated; "as good as Christians."

"Most of them have, no doubt," assented the young lady; "but this one's heart," indicating Taffy, "is centred on himself."

"That may be the way with them fashionable new pattern dogs—but it's not the way with Lost," stroking the other. "He will lie all day on Terence's coat, or you'll see him sitting above at the Cross for hours, waiting on the coach. I have him here betimes, and he comes contented enough, for he knows as Terence and me is friendly; and, indeed, so we are! Many a bit of baccy he brings me, and now and then a cigar, as I expect was give him by some gentleman on the coach."

"Then he often pays you a visit?"

"Every week, anyway. Ye see we have

both seen the world—though I have forty years the start of him. He don't mix much wid the Ballybay people ; he does his work, and there it ends."

" I suppose so. He is not married ? "

" Not he ! There's three or four watching to snare him, daughters of rich farmers, for, as ye may see, he is a well-looking fellow ; but he never spakes to a woman, and makes no freedom wid anyone."

A pause, during which Pat carefully knocked the ashes out of his pipe, then resumed :—

" Whin *I* was young I'd take a kiss where I could get it, so I would."

" But Mr. Terence is a gentleman," protested the girl, with a touch of hauteur.

" Is he so ? An' isn't a gentleman a man, and one pair of lips as sweet as another, whether it be lady or lady's maid ? "

Maureen, who was not prepared to discuss the pros and cons of kissing, quickly changed the subject by saying—

" You know you promised to tell me about your medals, and that's why I've come to see you ; I have been looking forward to a most interesting visit. Please begin. What regiment were you in ? "

" The Rifles. I was thirty years wid the

colours, in nine engagements, and one forlorn hope." And he straightened his stiff old shoulders with conscious pride.

"Won't you tell me some of your experiences?"

"And to be sure, and kindly welcome I'm glad to talk over the old times; I've seen many a quare thing between this and Pekin, and now I come back to where I was reared, to draw me pension—fourteen pence, for wounds and service—and meditate on them days gone by."

"And they were good days, I hope!"

"They were so, and I didn't make enough of them. Listen to me, ashore; enjoy yer youth now ye have it—the world is for the young."

"I'm not so sure of that," she retorted. "Grandmothers dance all night; grandfathers play cricket. Most young people nowadays have old minds; and the old pretend to be young."

To Pat this was too hard a saying. He reflected for a moment, gave it up with a shake of his head, and then continued—

"The folks around is poor ignorant people, as never wor further maybe than twenty mile. They are too busy to be listening to me; and if I weary yer ears you will let me know."

"I shall be only too glad to listen to you, Pat. I am woefully ignorant, and not at all busy."

"To begin, then, I was born here, and in that very cottage by the mill. I took the shilling on account of a young woman that went and got married to an ugly skinflint, all because he had a slated house with two sashed windows. Maybe but for that slated house and its temptation I'd never have stirred a toe out of this ;" and here he fell into a reflective muse, during which Miss D'Arcy gazed at the sea, and Taffy caught a fly.

"Well," with a shake of his shoulders, "I soldiered in Ireland, and I soldiered in Colchester, where a nice, tight, clean-skinned girl was terribly fond of me. Then we went out to the Indies, and got up to our necks in fighting. I was at Meerut ; we fought at the bridge and the turnpike, and oh ! but the weather was cruel hot ! What with the powder and the dust, and the shootin' and skirmishin', I was near bet up ! After that we marched to Delhi, sixty miles. Faix, we earned our grog *that* day ! We had some extraordinary fighting there. In one action I got mixed up in another regiment ; for I was always a very wild fighter, and there used to be a sort of red light before

me eyes. When all was over, and we fell in for rations and grog, sure I was missing ; and later on, when I turned up all dusty, and as dry as a limekiln, the corporal says, ' Ryan, you are returned as missing ; there's no grog for you.' ' I'll soon see about that,' says I, and I went and reported meeself to the commanding officer ; I did so, and I got a double tot, as well as what was owing to me, besides." (This success he announced with indescribable pride.) " Well, an' it was at Delhi we had the raal hard fighting ; I was in the storming party, and me comrade, Jim Nolan. We took the enemy unawares, as cautious as cats after a sparrow's nest, and not a spink of light nowhere ; but bedad, afther a bit there was blazing enough, *I* tell ye. The bullets was just shaking the hair on me head, and I have one in me neck this blessed minute. Still, it was grand ! There was Captain Hagan, a splendid officer—a raal bold soldier ; he was with the guns, and his men just worshipped him. But a round shot took him that same day, and, Queen of heaven ! but he was well avenged. Begob ! it was the hottest affair *I* was ever in ; we lost eighteen hundred men ; the ditch was eighteen foot wide ; so that was wan hundred souls to every twelve inches ! What do ye think of *that* for fighting ? but we

took the breach at the bayonet and skewered them. And the Dirty Shirts wrote on the walls, and wid good raison, 'Delhi will be remembered when Salamanca is forgotten.'"

Here he paused, and filled his pipe with a deliberate finger.

"I was recommended for the Cross, for I was in the forlorn hope, and I saved Jim Nolan by pulling him out of the ditch by the scruff av the neck when he was about half dead. But I'm drawing sixpence a day instead, and maybe it's better. Sure there's not wan hereabouts that knows a V.C. when they see it, and I feel in me bones as I surely earned it."

"I am certain you did," assented his listener, with an air of profound conviction. "And after the siege, what did you do in Delhi?"

"Oh, begorra, we weren't taking our aise, I tell ye. There was plenty of duties and sentry go. I was wance on guard over the ould King. He sat on a sort of gold bed—a charpoy they call it—and I just stood inside the door to kape me eye on him. All of a sudden an officer in full uniform burst in, and before I could draw a breath he had the King by the throat, and the coat ripped off him, choking the life out of him, and shouting, 'You old scoundrel! You old devil, I'll kill you! Your hour has come.' He

was a terribly powerful man, and I had the mischief's own work to pull him off, for he was mad, like—ye see, his wife and children had been butchered. Faix, it was a bad business for me, and I nearly got broke over it. The sergeant of the guard was raging; he come in, cursing like a lion, and nearly shook me out of me belts."

"Did you get any loot?" asked Miss D'Arcy.

"Yes, miss, I did so, and I'll tell ye no lie about it. I got a gold ornament as big as a cricket ball, but sure I ate it, and drank it, and smoked it, for I'd no way of carrying it rightly, ye see, an' at the end of a month I was as poor as ever. One chap I know picked up a string of red stones as big as robins' eggs, and thinking they were glass, sold them for a couple of bottles of arrack—and them worth thousands."

"That *was* a bad bargain!—no doubt they were rubies. Did you ever see Hodgson?"

"Faix, I did so; a fine lump of a man. He was killed in Lucknow."

"And John Nicholson, did you know him?"

"Is it Nicholson? Sure, I knew him as well as if I'd made him! Oh, then there was the Darlin', God rest him! Them was the times; and when the marching and fighting was over,

our Colonel made a grand speech to us, all drawn up on parade. He was a heavy old man, and he cried like a child, and he said, 'I'm leaving yees for honours, me brave boys, but they are all owing to you as fought for them.' And, by me oath, he never said a truer word. After that we went to China, and I was at the taking of the Taku forts. Oh, I've seen a power of life—and strange things; seen quare people and eaten quare rations: and here I am, back among the turf and potatoes, as if I'd never stirred a foot out of the parish."

"You must have been very sorry to leave your old regiment, and say good-bye."

"Sorry! I believe ye. Good-bye is two little words; but they hold a deal of grief in them. May ye never know it!" And here he paused, sighed heavily, and veiled himself in tobacco smoke.

"Ah, look, there goes the dog! Terence must be coming, though we cannot see him. I expect he will be bringing me a pinch of bird's-eye. I'm a great smoker, and nigh run dry," turning out his empty pouch.

"In that case I hope you will allow me to fill your pouch sometimes?" said Miss D'Arcy, rising. "I must go now. Thank you very

much for all you have told me. I'll come and see you again before long," and she ran down the hill, followed by Taffy.

In the distance she noticed a tall figure, accompanied by a bounding dog, who made a wide détour possibly to avoid her.

"So you've had a lady visitor," exclaimed Terence, as he accosted old Pat. "Here you are, Daddy," handing him a canister, then threw himself full length on the grass.

"Thank ye kindly. Aye, I have so ; she's a real lady, and has no more pride about her than—than——" searching for a simile.

"Than *I* have," lazily suggested his companion, as he pulled out his pipe and knocked it on a stone.

"An' what would be the good of saying that, when I know ye are as proud as Beelzebub?"

"Thank you, Daddy, I had no idea you knew Beelzebub so well."

"She made out ye wor a gentleman," resumed the old soldier, with little cackling laugh.

"The Prince of Darkness *is* a gentleman," retorted his listener.

Pat stared, and then exclaimed with some asperity—

"Faix, that's quare sort of talk, even for a Protestant."

"And so you were discussing me, Daddy. What did you say?"

"Bedad," taking off his hat, and slowly passing his hand over his head, "I don't rightly remember; only something about kissing girls—or not kissing them."

Terence suddenly started into a sitting posture.

"Patrick Ryan, you have been drinking the lady's health."

"I wish I may die if I have," was the fervent response. "But I won't die till I've drunk it—in the *best*."

"Well, then, you've been merely romancing. Go on. What next?" and he threw himself down again.

"She was terribly interested about battles and fighting. When I talked, her eyes were shining like two stars."

"That may pass; you are becoming quite poetical in your old age. I say, Daddy, those new bays pull like good ones. My arms ache, I can tell you." Then he drew his hat over his eyes, and having stretched the said weary arms, folded them at the back of his head, whilst Lost came and lay down close beside his master.

"It's all very fine, my boy"—to Lost—"but if my arms are pulled out you and I will starve!"

"Bedad! there's no fear of that," remarked Pat, with much emphasis. "I wish I was as sure of heaven! What ailed the bastes? The teams does run as smooth as oil when you are driving."

"Walsh, the confounded idiot, put them together all wrong, and I had no time to change; the off-side wheeler bored the whole way. Look here, Daddy, did you say that the young lady was coming to see you again?"

"Aye, and soon; she's bringing me baccy," and his eyes twinkled greedily.

"Never mind baccy; but tell her not to be roaming about the hills and glens alone."

"How do you know she does that?" questioned the old soldier, with a sharp glance.

"I know, and that's enough. It is not safe, and you must warn her."

"An' will ye listen to him?" cried Pat, appealing to the dog. "And aren't we in Ireland, where, of all countries in the wide world, men holds young girls in honour and respect?"

"It is true, and thank God I belong to that race," assented Terence gravely, "but there

are several fellows about not right in their heads. You know that yourself."

"Yes, Dennehy's brother is terribly wild, and yet John and the wife keep him, and put up wid him at their fireside, day and night, sooner nor let him go to the union. Aye, but them's the good-hearted people. There's one or two more quiet lunatics around; some says it's the salt fish, and more says it's tay-drinking, drives them melancholy."

"Then there is Joey, the dwarf," continued Terence. "He would think very little of robbing her. I wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw him."

"Faix, even *you* couldn't throw him far; he weighs a power. As for robbing, sure she's as poor as a crow; there's no fear of her whatever. The worst and lowest fellow around is Andy Mulcairn. Did you hear tell of him, Terence?"

Terence shook his head slowly.

"When his father was ill—and a very old man he was—the doctor came to see him on a red ticket, and after he left, Andy ups and he says, 'The doctor thinks you can't live over the night, so rise out of that and sweep the house whilst I go for the whisky for the wake!'"

"Yes."

"Well, the ould man did his big best, and

when Andy come back, there was the place all elegantly redd up, the big skillet on the fire quite handy," here Pat dropped his voice as he added, "and the old father stretched out stone dead."

"May his son do the same to Andy!" cried Terence, with a fierce jerk of his arm.

Pat puffed away for some time in deep meditation, and an unusually long silence ensued.

"What part of the world are you in, Daddy," asked his companion at last, "Delhi or Dublin?"

"Well, then, I'm just where I'm sitting, and I'm thinking of you. Terence, it never came into me head till to-day, though I knew you were eddicated and above us all; but the lady spoke a true word when she said ye wor a gentleman. Still, many trates you like a common jarvey, and ye show no ill will. I've met gentlemen in the ranks; ye wor that—yes, a gentleman ranker!"

Terence looked at Pat with an expression of grim amusement as he answered, "It's a wrong guess, Daddy. Go to the bottom of the class. I never belonged to

the legion of the lost ones,
To the cohort of the damned!"

The old soldier gazed at him first in angry bewilderment, then his expression changed to a narrow, searching regard. What ailed Terence? He was queer and out of himself this day. As the pensioner stared, Terence raised his eyes and looked at him steadily, and said:—

“If you go on jawing about gentleman I’ll not come near you again, I warn you. I like you, Daddy, and I like our bit of a smoke, and a ‘buk’ about the Indies, as you call them; but all the same, I’m just Terence the driver. I work hard for my living, as my aching arms well know, and because I don’t drink, or fight, or play the fool, and keep myself to myself, you have got grand new notions in your head.”

“Well, if I have, ’twas she put them there; you blame *her*.” And Pat puffed at his pipe, with half-closed eyes and a dogged expression.

“Oh, old Daddy,” exclaimed the young man suddenly, “I’m getting sick of this life; early morning parades, and courts-martial, and sentry-go, that you talk of, were nothing to it—no, nor riding schools nor stables.”

“I never was in the horse sojers, so I know nothing av that. Evening school was enough an’ plenty; but if ye are sick av it, Terence, me boy, why the divil do ye stick to it?”

"Because it's my duty to do all I can—for a thankless woman."

"Oh, I was full sure there was a woman somewhere round the corner," chuckled Pat. "They have a spoon in everywan's stirabout."

"Yes, you may generally bet on that," replied Terence, with a short laugh. Then, springing to his feet, he added, "By George! I was nearly forgetting that I have to meet the vet. at the farm at six o'clock; one of the young horses is in a bad way. Come, Lost! Ta-ta, Daddy!" and he left at a run.

"By George! indeed," echoed the old soldier as he sat up and gazed after him. "An officer in the horse soldiers, I'll go bail. By George! here is another good gentleman broke, and come down in the world, all over some bad woman."

CHAPTER XII

"SAUCE FOR THE GANDER"

THERE was no use in pretending that it was a sea fog, a mountain mist, or even a nice soft morning, for it was a pouring wet day.

The rain trickled sadly down the window-panes of Lady Fanshawe's bower, and at the window stood Miss D'Arcy surveying the angry brown sea, with its battalions of charging white horses, and the funereal pall of heavy clouds which now concealed the mountains. The wind blew in furious gusts, raging down the chimney and rattling the sashes; miserable donkeys, carrying panniers of dripping wrack, escorted by their drenched drivers, were the only creatures to be seen abroad, though at intervals a dog, marked in black and white patches resembling a draught-board, patrolled the street with an air of considerable importance—he belonged to the police barrack, and came forth in order to reconnoitre and report.

As Maureen was still contemplating this hopeless prospect, the door was thrown open with a violent bang, and Lady Fanshawe entered, looking white and excited. She threw herself into an armchair before she opened her lips, and then exclaimed, breathlessly—

"Condole with me, dear! Polson is going this day week."

"Condole?" repeated her sister, turning towards her. "On the contrary, accept my warmest congratulations."

"Oh, I forgot; you never could endure her. But what is to become of me? I've no more idea of doing my hair than I have of sailing a boat! I shall never get a maid in this part of the world. What do you say?"

"Julia," suggested the other with a mischievous smile.

"Maureen, the next time you are in any trouble don't look to *me* for sympathy!" cried Lady Fanshawe, with considerable heat.

"Tell me all about it, dear, and then I'll sympathize; but you won't expect me to *cry*, will you?" Here she came over and settled herself in a corner of the sofa, arranged a cushion behind her head, and prepared to give the subject her fullest attention.

"I declare, you are the most aggravating girl——"

"What precipitated the crisis?" she interrupted.

"A blouse! I thought Polson would have had it ready to try on, and she had never even touched it. I must say I felt extremely cross; and when I spoke to her she was downright insolent! And I always had an idea that Polson was nice, and took an interest in me," she concluded, with a slightly tearful sniff.

"She took an interest in your correspondence, for I've seen her reading your letters, and I told you so."

Lady Fanshawe waved away this frivolous interruption, and then continued rapidly—

"She said she had never engaged to come to this savage sort of a place; Paris, Homburg, Cannes she did not so much mind."

"How surprising!"

"But here she has no society—she and Mrs. Duckitt's maid are dead cuts—the people speak a foreign language, and the women go bare-foot."

"Surely the fact that the Kerry girls wear no shoes is hardly a reason for her leaving your service!"

"My dear, she does not *want* a reason! Pray,

what is to become of me? How on earth am I to do my hair? I shall look a perfect fright, I shall be unrecognizable. Still, I'm not going to abase myself, and ask Polson to remain until I go back. It will be rather funny if I am obliged to return to London simply because I can't do my own hair."

"Never mind, I'll undertake your coiffure."

"Come, that's a promise!" cried her sister, clapping her hands. "You have a wonderful knack of doing your own wig, and now I shall be able to snap my fingers at Polson. I dare say Julia will manage to button my boots and brush my skirts."

Here a violent gust of wind dashed the rain wildly against the panes—it actually came spitting down the chimney.

"Isn't this appalling!" she exclaimed. "I don't wonder, now, that Lord Beaconsfield called Ireland a melancholy isle, and that people are always quarrelling and murdering one another. Before the day is over, I'm bound to fight with someone!"

"Mrs. Duckitt?" suggested Maureen with a laugh. "No, she is out of your reach. She really is amphibious. She has gone off to the Leam. However, you can fall back on little Fouché—it is so much more uncommon to

fight with a man than with one of your own sex."

"But I rather like little Fouché. He has always something pleasant to say, and brings me all the news, and knows who everyone is, where they come from, where they are going. He is so sharp that nothing escapes him. It was he who noticed that party of three—and that two of them did not speak!"

"Of course not. Three is trumpery; and, talking of Monsieur Fouché, there he goes, with his little mackintosh and umbrella. I don't think he will pick up much news *to-day*. Candidly, I don't like Mr. Foulcher."

"Why not, pray?"

"Because he has such a silky manner and a lying-in-wait eye!"

"Well, it will wait a long time before it finds any event worth recording—anything to open it widely—in these parts. What shall I do to-day, Moll? I miss Mrs. Larkins frightfully—you don't play piquet—I can't go out—I cannot eat any more for hours. I've read the papers, and devoured my very last novel!"

"Play patience," was the brisk reply. "Let us have a game of Miss Millikin's!"

"But, my dear girl, I *am* playing patience; and one kind at a time is amply sufficient. I

want some excitement, some novelty ; my particular chums are gone. I feel like one of those horrid jelly-fish, putting out my tentacles to catch hold of something, but, alas! it's all empty space!"

"Nita, I wish you had a child!"

"My dear Maureen, what an abrupt, knock-me-down remark—and how truly like you!"

"You could put your tentacles round it so nicely ; it would be a novelty, and afford you plenty of excitement, especially if it proved to be like Mrs. Larkins's enterprising boy, who climbed out on the window ledge and ran about the roof, and frightened us into fits!"

"Odious little brat! and so ugly."

"If he were yours you'd think him a Cupid!"

"No, indeed, I adore pretty children, and I must confess that that picture of Lady Marabout with her two boys almost makes me envious. I shouldn't mind being painted like that ; but children are such a tie—I could never rush about as I do now."

"Why not? I would act as Regent."

"*You!* You'll be married yourself within twelve months."

"Not likely. My money is my attraction—my sole attraction."

"Nonsense ; you are—as even Mrs. Larkins

allowed—a very pretty girl, with a really striking air."

"At any rate, it strikes terror into the hearts of some of your most ornamental young men. But I cannot help myself. I am an Australian Blue gum—not a delicate Blue Belle—and perhaps there is something of the monkey puzzle about me!" she added, with an arch glance.

"Yes, that severe manner of yours is completely out of date. You should never pretend to be shocked at things."

"*Pretend!* I never pretend, as you call it."

"No, no; what am I saying? You could not, poor child, if you tried, no more than you can flirt. I'm positively certain that if a man were to squeeze your hand you would instantly box his ears."

"It would depend upon who he was," replied the girl, with a demure smile.

"Of course, once *you* fall in love you'll go head over ears!"

"I hope so."

"And I hope it will be with the right man."

"I say ditto to Mr. Burke," getting up to renovate the fire. "And I swear here, on this black poker, that I will *not* be married for my money. You were married for love; you have

had the good fortune to get an excellent husband."

"Grev certainly is a prize, though he has his little failings, such as a hot temper and a certain amount of *solid* obstinacy, but he is one in a thousand! I'm afraid," looking towards the window, "the poor dear will be drowned."

"Not more so than Mrs. Duckitt."

"Pooh! The widow is a witch. You can't drown a witch."

"A water witch?"

"A water snake—a toad. I'm certain that woman is web-footed. By the way, who went on the car with Grev?"

"Mrs. Duckitt. Did you not know that? Captain Willis shirked it at the last moment, and she took the seat."

"Horrid, intriguing creature, she'd go through fire and water to be with Grev!"

"My dear Nita, it is not possible that you are jealous?"

"I jealous!" screamed Nita, with an air of outraged vanity. "What *will* you say next?"

"No, of course, I was only joking. It ought to be the other way about, with your crowd of admirers. I declare, when you enter a ball-room with your queue in tow, you look like a

great kite—and you must allow that Grev gives you lots of string."

"Rope to hang myself—yes. If he ever were really jealous it would be the end of all things—the Day of Judgment; but he knows that he can trust *me*."

"And you won't trust him! How generous!"

"I trust no man—I learnt that with my alphabet. What's this book?" opening one indolently. "Oh, Kipling's 'Seven Seas.'" Then she read aloud, "To G. F. from G. D., in memory of some pleasant days on the Seven Lakes!" "And I suppose this is *another* pleasant day!" and she flung the volume across the room with vindictive force.

"Poor book!" said Maureen, stooping; "why should you suffer? Nita, why don't you go on with that waistcoat you are making for Grev! At this rate, it will come in for your silver wedding. Or write letters!—this is the ideal day for one's Indian mail. I'm going upstairs to write to Florence Durrant."

Lady Fanshawe sat for some time in silence, staring fiercely at the fire.

"I loathe writing foreign letters," she said at last. "I believe I shall do something desperate, or hang myself."

"Oh no, drowning is *far* easier," laughed

her sister. "You've only to go and stand on the tennis ground. I'll give your love to Flo; and whatever you do, don't get into mischief, Nittikins;" and she blew her a kiss as she left the room.

As soon as her steps had died away, Lady Fanshawe reached for her writing board, and, after a considerable amount of cogitation, scribbled off a note, put it in an envelope, addressed it with flowing pen, and stamped it with energy, saying aloud as she did so--

"What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander."

Then she rose, opened the door, and looked into the passage; here she saw Captain Willis.

"Can I be of any assistance?" he asked, with much *empressement*.

"Yes. Has the old blind horse and pink car, known as Her Majesty's mail, yet departed?"

"No, but it is outside the post-office now. Shall I run over for you?"

"Oh, thank you so much," handing him the letter. "How good of you! I'll reward you with afternoon tea."

"And I'll take it for no reward beyond the pleasure of doing you a service," volunteered

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a little elderly gentleman with keen blue eyes, "and the one wetting will do."

"No, thank you, Mr. Foulcher," she responded, with her sweetest smile. "Captain Willis offered first." (This little Mr. Foulcher was such a dreadful gossip, urged the rare whisper of prudence.)

Lady Fanshawe's chosen messenger immediately unfurled his umbrella and dashed across to the post-office; ere he posted the epistle he happened to catch sight of its address:—

Bertrand Lovelace-Lovell, Esqre.,
David-drog Castle,
Anglesea, N. Wales.

When he had read this, Captain Willis dropped it deliberately into the letter-box, accompanying the action by a long and expressive whistle.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MISSION

WHEN Miss D'Arcy left her sister, with a joke and a wafted kiss, she ran upstairs *en route* to her own room in order to write letters. However, on the landing she discovered Julia, and several other servants, gazing intently down the street, and paused to ascertain what was attracting their attention.

They were looking at a passing funeral.

"Happy the corpse the rain rains on," came into her head, as the long, black, dripping procession went slowly by, a seemingly endless stream of vehicles, chiefly turf carts and asses' cars.

"Do you know whose funeral it is?" she asked Julia, with whom she was sharing a window.

"'Tis Danny Flynn from the Windy Gap, going to his last home—and may his journey

thrive with him!" crossing herself as she concluded.

"What a string of cars and carts! Where can they all come from?"

"There wasn't a finer show this last year!" Here Julia shook her fist at a fat man under an umbrella, who was nodding to her with the greatest affability.

"Tim Dempsey," she explained. "I'm black out wid him! What do ye think he says last time I saw him? 'Why, Julia,' says he, 'ye got shocking fat! Ye fell terribly into flesh!' Doesn't that come well from a gross creature like thon? Me bones is covered, I'll allow, but me worst enemy couldn't call me *fat*. I promise ye I'll have a settlement with him yet. Wait till I see him at the mission."

"Mission?" repeated Miss D'Arcy. "What sort of a mission?"

"Well, then, miss, I'm not very good at explaining, but I'll do what I can." And Julia, who liked talking, leant her flat back against the wall, and deliberately prepared for narration.

"Missioners is priests given up to the good work. They come to a place and hold services, and preach, and advise, and confess—they make a terrible stir—and the good and bad alike does flock to them in hundreds and thousands."

"I can understand the good ; but why the bad ? "

" Bekase some feels less shame in confessing their misdeeds, and sins, and neglected duties to a stranger than to their own parish priest, as knows *all* about them. Some hours does he set apart for confession. We had a mission here not long ago, and now there's to be one at Clonsast—an' faix, not before it was wanted ! It was grand here—the whole place alive with stalls, selling pictures, and medals, and rosaries. Every wan's yard full of carts, and every house full of people. The chapel was crammed hour after hour, with them as was waiting their turn to be confessed—those as had business paid others to keep their places—though wan man took an advantage, getting in through the chapel window at five in the morning, no less."

"That was rather a shabby trick."

"Yes, and the last week there was awful work, squeezing and scrooging—a pack of the rough ones come and fought for places. I won't name no names, but some women made a holy show of themselves, boxing to get near the confessional—think of that !—till the missionary had to come out and speak to them himself. An' there was one missionary, a nice soft man, and all the heavy sinners was waiting

to get him! Holy St. Patrick! such striving and manoeuvrin' as was never seen!"

"Do you think these missions do good?"

"A power, glory be to God!" rejoined Julia, with pious emphasis. "I love them, so I do, and go whenever there is wan. They have always the finest preaching, and they help every wan; putting the men from drink, and the women from fighting and keeping their houses dirty, and having nothing for the poor husband coming in after his day's work. The place is always a dale the better of the missions, and so are the people in it, for some of the missionaries does be real wicked preachers, and puts the fear of death in them, an' so I tell ye."

"What do you mean by a wicked preacher?"

"I just mean a preacher with a great power, and splendid words, that makes ye trimble when ye think of yer sins. There's to be a grand mission at Clonsast, and I'm going, if I walk every step of the road on me ten toes."

"How long will it last?"

"In or about a week. There does be one evening for the women and another for the men. I'd like well to go and hear the men getting a telling over. Goodness forgive me if it is a sinful thought!"

"Here is the mail," said Miss D'Arcy, as a

heavily-laden coach, covered with umbrellas, came spinning down the street.

"Tare an' agers, but they are wet!" exclaimed Julia. "And look at Terence, wid the water streaming av of him. Johnny Kays is sick, and he'll have to take on the six o'clock—a forty-five-mile drive—before he's done. Some gives out he is a sevale master. Anyhow he makes them lazy gcssoors work, and no one can ever say as Terence spares himself!"

"What a long day's work it will be!"

"Ye may say so, and a terrible responsibility, in charge of all thim passengers, in all sorts of weathers, wid all sorts of divils of horses. Oh, 'tis a hard life!"

Then, to a distant but imperative call, "Sure I'm coming, coming; take it aisy is my motto, and if ye can't take it aisy, take it as aisy as ye can! Don't I know them well?—they'll all be wanting tay and dry clothes, and, bedad, in ten minutes' time the kitchen will be like a steam laundry."

CHAPTER XIV

A GENTLE HINT

THE Sabbath at Ballybay was invariably respected as a day of rest—that is to say, as far as fishing and excursions were concerned ; a little run with the beagles was another affair. The boatmen lounged about after Mass, or sat on walls, unrecognizable in their best clothes. Their employers were equally metamorphosed, by means of white shirts and summer suits : no one more so than Mrs. Duckitt, who appeared at church in a black and white French costume, and a toque of price. For once, her toilette actually eclipsed that of Lady Fanshawe, who loved her none the better for this unexpected reverse. Among the strangers, a long walk was the accepted mode of spending a Sunday afternoon ; and as Nita pleaded a racking headache, Sir Greville and her sister set forth, merely accompanied by the inevitable Taffy.

"It is a pity we could not have got hold of Mrs. Duckitt," he remarked, as they stepped briskly down the road. "She thoroughly enjoys a good constitutional; but I think she has gone on with Mr. Foulcher—if we look sharp we may overtake them."

Maureen made no reply. She was wondering if she ought to give Greville a hint. Should she insinuate her finger between wood and bark—interfere between man and wife—a notoriously dangerous office? But Nita was so unreasonably angry, and poor Grev had not the remotest idea of how seriously she interpreted his friendship with Mrs. Duckitt. He had not seen a single straw to indicate how the wind blew. Yes, she would venture.

"Perhaps it is just as well," she blundered out bravely. Grev had a hot temper, and she was not sure how he would receive her gentle hint. Her heart beat unusually fast as she added, "Nita—well—she does not care for her, and rather grudges you so much of Mrs. Duckitt's company."

"My dear simple child, what rot you are talking!"

"Perhaps so. I am not of a jealous nature myself, but you know you and Mrs. D. are inseparable on water, and if you come to be

inseparable on land——” and she laughed a little nervously.

“Upon my word, Maureen, if you were not so uncouth and foolish, I should be half inclined to be annoyed with you. Your Aunt Rosa declares that you have the family propensity to say odd things, and can’t help yourself.”

“I suppose not. Please forgive me, Grev. I *meant* well.”

“Yes, but your good intentions may just stop short of lecturing me. Now, I happen to like Mrs. Duckitt, as an intelligent, genial little woman, with no nonsense about her. We fish together, certainly—perhaps you would like to come out, and do chaperon? We shall be charmed.”

“No, thanks,” rather stiffly; “I’ve no desire to be offered as an oblation to Mrs. Grundy.”

“Mrs. Grundy be hanged! I’m aware that Mrs. Duckitt and Nita don’t hit it off; but then they have no interest in common” (“except yourself,” thought his listener), “and Nita likes many people I cordially detest, but I make no demur. I am a liberal-minded man, Nita is a liberal-minded woman. At any rate, she has never given me the occasion to think otherwise.” (“She’s never had a chance,” said her sister to herself.) “Our taste in friends is

obviously our own concern; there is no fear of any scandal, you ridiculous child, and you are much too young to understand these matters, *voilà tout.*"

Maureen collapsed into silence. She had been justly snubbed, and, after all, she had no right to interfere. Meanwhile, they were walking by the shores of the lake, occasionally attended by an escort of lively young pigs, past fuchsia hedges, past white cottages, patches of potatoes reclaimed from the bog, and crops of oats snatched from among the stones. By noisy, foolish streams, bustling headlong to the lake, they climbed the narrow goat paths and sheep tracks which led up to the heart of the hills. Now and then a heavy grouse made a spring from the heather at their feet and whirled away, or a timid blue hare started from her form. The day was calm, not to say sluggish—the call of a curfew carried far in the still air—masses of mist began to gather slowly about the mountain, and sometimes a trailing cloud would sweep from one peak to another like a sheeted spectre.

"I believe we shall have a downpour," announced Sir Greville. "And you are in a thin dress, Moll. We had better hurry and get home as fast as we can. Turn down this path, and go ahead full speed."

They lost no time in reaching the lake road, where they discovered Mr. Foulcher, evidently awaiting them with complimentary patience.

"I've been watching you for some time," he remarked, hastily shoving what looked like field-glasses into his pocket. "I really did not recognise you, Miss D'Arcy, in your—may I say?—fine feathers. I quite thought you and Sir Greville were another couple," and he laughed, and looked mysterious.

"Pray, what have you done with Mrs. Duckitt?" demanded Sir Greville.

"She misdoubted those clouds, and as the parish priest was passing he offered her a lift on his car, which she was only too thankful to accept."

"I wish someone would drive along now," said Miss D'Arcy. "It is going to pour, and all my fine feathers will be drenched. It is coming on; there's a drop! Let us make for the nearest cottage." And she took to her heels and began to run at a smart pace, pursued by the two men and a cold and pitiless shower.

Before we follow them, a few words about Mr. Foulcher may not be out of place.

Mr. Foulcher — nicknamed Fouché — was sixty years of age; a small, spare, dapper gentleman, of means and leisure. His quiet,

careful little manner concealed an insatiable curiosity, and a bottomless interest in other people's business. He was a square block in a round hole; instead of being the proprietor of a fine house in Palace Gardens, his proper *locale* was Scotland Yard. There he might have been a brilliant star, whereas all his fine natural talents were undeveloped and wasted in petty and unprofitable channels. He had no ties; his wife had separated from him, finding domestic espionage intolerable, so he was free to roam about the world, seeking what secrets he might devour. Generally speaking, he was not unpopular. He was polite, self-possessed, with a fund of agreeable small-talk (and an army of family skeletons at his beck and call); he fished a little, dabbled in archæology, played a sound game of whist, hated bridge like poison, and took a constitutional every day, accompanied by the policeman's dog. But his favourite diversion was to lurk quietly in the verandah, watching all arrivals and departures, carefully putting two and two together, and drawing some remarkable conclusions.

Meanwhile, he and Sir Greville were running after a young lady, who dashed open a gate, and raced down a path into the pensioner's cottage, which she entered headlong. At first,

in the semi-darkness, it appeared to be full of people.

"We are taking you by storm, Pat—my brother and Mr. Foulcher and I; we want shelter from the rain," and as she spoke—a little breathlessly—she shook her wet hat and glanced round the kitchen.

A respectable old man with a furrowed face sat by the fire, a "boy" with long dangling legs occupied the table, and Terence, the coachman, and his dog shared the wooden settle.

As the party entered, the latter stood up and touched his hat.

"Well, Pat," said Sir Greville, as his eyes travelled over the low room, lit by one small window, but its wooden furniture and crockery as neat as a barrack quarter, "you are uncommonly snug here, I must say."

"Anyhow, 'tis better than laving me bones in one of them Indian cemeteries. Take a chair, miss. Here's a seat for your honour, and Mr. Foulcher. Terence, don't stir."

"And how are all the horses?" enquired Sir Greville, turning to him.

"All right, thank you, sir."

"You have a wonderfully level lot—three-quarter bred, I'm told, and quite young. Do they give you much trouble?"

"No; some are a little green, of course, but young horses like coaching—it amuses them!"

Sir Greville laughed, and said, "I never heard of horses liking amusement."

"Oh, have you not? Many are keen on racing, and crazy about hunting."

"That was a crazy lot that we had in the coach the day we came over."

"No, on the contrary, one of the steadiest teams. They had been badly put together—not in their places. You know the saying, 'A team well placed is half driven.'"

"I know very little of coaching, I'm afraid."

"And you must not be too hard on the horses. You should lay some blame on a red umbrella."

"Yes. And the spotted mare! How is she?"

"Rather inclined to be lazy, and just run behind her collar."

Whilst this conversation was taking place Miss D'Arcy was shaking out the feathers of her hat, and Mr. Foulcher, having dried his face in his handkerchief, became lost in amazement to find the taciturn, surly coachman, from whom he never elicited more than "Yes, sir," or "No, sir," in full flow of conversation. The coachman was one of his pet subjects. He was

certain that he was a man with a past—a man who had seen better days. What had been his past? Where had he spent those days?

But the coachman was impenetrable, and maintained a stern non-committing silence. He lived aloof; he had no love affairs, no enemies, no debts—so much Mr. Foulcher had ascertained. Here was an unexpected opportunity. He resolved to turn it to the best account, and exact some useful hints—the mere end of a clue would suffice.

"You are such an experienced whip," he said now, accosting him, "that I suppose you have been driving for years?"

"Yes, sir, some years."

"Not so very many, though. Come, now," assuming a genial air, "I should say you were under thirty."

"Should you, sir? I never keep my birthdays."

"Always in the horse business? Brought up to it, eh?"

"Always in the horse business since I was a boy."

"Since you were a boy—dear me! But you have been fairly educated, eh?"

"Yes, I can read and write—and put two and two together."

"Not married, I believe? Give the petticoats a wide berth, eh?"

No reply to this query, so he continued effusively—

"Irish, of course?"

"Irish, of course." A slight pause, and then he added, in a cool, slow voice: "Is there any further information I can give you?"

The coachman's manner was deferential, but his eyes had assumed an expression of haughty enquiry, and his tone implied a challenge.

Something in his bearing froze the brimming flood of questions on Mr. Foulcher's tongue. He became filled with an uneasy conviction that he had taken a liberty. Yes, a liberty with this man, his social inferior. He was sensible of discomfort, defeat—a public defeat; and with a reddened complexion and a nervous "Oh no, no," he subsided into a kitchen chair and a sudden hatred of Terence, the coachman.

Much of this scene had been lost on Pat, who had been busily employed in putting on turf and chasing out an intrusive duck.

"This is me cousin Flagherty, sir," he explained, now presenting the old man near the fire, "come over from beyant the Shannon to pay me a bit of a visit. We were discoursin' about the land, and the changes this last forty year——"

"Then I beg you won't allow me to interrupt you," said Sir Greville. "I am English, as you know, and a landlord into the bargain, but I should greatly like to hear the question from your point of view. Can you tell me how it is that all the landlords are broke?"

"Me cousin Flagherty can spake well. Go on, Dan; you can tell them all about it, for ye know I was out of the country for twenty year."

The little man by the fire turned round, with his old worn-out hands still on his knees, and gravely surveyed his unusual audience with a pair of small, shrewd eyes. He saw Sir Greville, the rich, pleasant-spoken Englishman, waiting to hear what he had to say, with a look of honest interest. He saw the other stranger, old and indifferent, watching the young lady out of the corner of his eye, with a certain pensive curiosity; the young lady, beautiful as the moonlight, with the hair and eyes of a Kerry girl, leaning back in her chair toying with her hat; and Terence in the background, silent and retired, as became his station.

CHAPTER XV

THE DESMONDS

"THEN, since ye ask me, sir, how we all get broke, I'll explain to the best of me ability. Oh, indeed, it was plain enough! There's nothing aisier than spending money! It's like rowlin' down a hill, the simplest thing when ye are going, but mighty hard to stop—that is, when there is any hill left to run down. Now I'll give ye an example," and he paused, and looked round the little circle. "Ye might have heard tell of the Desmonds?"

Sir Greville shook his head, Mr. Foulcher shrugged his shoulders. The coachman stared fixedly at the speaker, and then slowly turned his eyes upon the fire of sods.

"Well, I declare, I'm surprised at that! They were a noble race, hundreds and hundreds of years ago. They say as the good lord, who was killed by the English, still keeps his state

under the waters of Lough Von, and every seven years he comes in full armour and rides round the lake just after dawn, till he returns to claim it all again. But long after that fairy tale there were still grand Desmonds, and they flourished till about twenty year ago. Well, sir, what happened to them happened to us all, for we all went the one road. Old Desmond had the land for miles and miles. Some of it was his own out and out, some of it he had under Lord Glanmore, and they said he paid a smart rent, though he had it for ever and ever. He was a splendid gentleman, and kept a pack of hounds up at the castle, and had officers from Dublin staying with him, hunting all winter; the house full of servants, wax candles everywhere ye could put wan; the best of ating and drinking for all. Ah, them was the times! And the way the quality turned out, and the power of them that used to be at the meet, you'd not see the like av it now—no, nor the sport. I mind wance—when I was a gossoon—the fox making straight for the mountain. The going was terribly hard on the slopes of Slieve Bloom, but the hounds kept the line, and through Mr. Desmond's demesne, then back into the low country, wid only the couple of hounds left, and that grand

fox was killed in the darkness. There was hardly a soul wid the pack ; the run was twenty Irish miles, including the Boherphuca Mountain; they ran into three counties, and not a man got his dinner till one o'clock in the morning."

Maureen's eyes sparkled with enthusiasm. They were met unexpectedly by those of the coachman. His glance, too, had kindled at the tale, but she noticed that he looked unlike himself—white and stern ; or was it merely the shadow in that dim little kitchen ?

" That was something like ! " exclaimed Sir Greville.

" Yes, and ould Desmond was well to the front. Troth, he was a terror upon a horse ! He had two sons and three elegant daughters—the finest girls in Ireland. They went to Dublin in the Castle saison, and I hear they spent a hape of money. When the ould man died he left each of the girls a grand fortune ; but he had no money, so it was a charge on the estate, ye see. Then Master Dermot, the son, he raised a mortgage on the land when the sisters got married, and went off with the money, leaving the debt there. Do ye understand ? "

" Perfectly," assented Sir Greville. " We do

the same things over in England, I'm sorry to say."

"After that, Master Dermot said as he'd have to give up the hounds and shut up the place; but the times was good, and he didn't. There was no Australian mutton nor American beef then, and a grand price for stock."

Sir Greville nodded.

"So he got a man down from Dublin to value the land, and the long and the short of it was that he riz the rint all round upon us all. 'Sure,' says he, 'yez can pay them rints as well now as ye did yer ould rints at ould prices, and the thrain here amost at yer door, and a great fair in Ballymore every month, which was more nor your fathers had.'"

Here Flagherty came to a full stop, deliberately cleared his throat, and looked about to see if he had everyone's attention.

"Well, we strove to pay our rints—some did, and some didn't—for many years. And Master Dermot married a lady from Dublin, a rale beauty she was, and as sweet a creather as I ever seen, but divil a penny she brought him; and they had a good-sized family. A few died off young, but still there was some left, and they all knew how to spend money—where was the Desmond that didn't?—and old

Madam Desmond herself was beyond everything for extravagance—I mean Mr. Dermot's mother. Well, the poor master was a'most broke, he giv up the hounds at last, and sure ye'd pity him, if ye seen him going about riding the white mare, as was twenty year old if she was a day, and she the only riding horse in the stable. Then he got another loan on the land, which was near every penny the place was worth. He hadn't a baste on the home farm—it was all let to graziers—but sure it was all the same, he could get no rint from them, when they could get no price for cattle."

At this point old Pat and the "boy" nodded their heads sagely.

"When he failed to pay the interest the mortgagees sold him up, and that killed him."

"Dear, dear! that was a bad business," ejaculated Sir Greville, sympathetically.

"All the sons was dead, for two was drowned; but wan, the youngest, he was off in India wid his regiment, and left things to his agents. The agents was Watts and Humphrey, of Dublin; ye know they are bad men, and are very hard on the poor."

"No, I never heard of them."

"So best for you, sir. There was a power of trouble in the country then, and nobody was

paying any rent, since we didn't see no good in paying it to Watts and Humphrey, when we heard that the divil a copper went into young Desmond's pocket, but all to some rascal in London that had the mortgage."

"That is quite a novel idea."

"Yes. Begorra, we wouldn't pay it, and we didn't pay, in spite of Watts and Humphrey—divil a penny we paid for four year."

"And you are pretty well off now, I conclude?" remarked Sir Greville, rather drily.

"Middling, sir; the Land Commission have reduced the rents, and they are reasonable enough, but the Desmonds is broke. Lord Glanmore went agin them for his land, and the Desmonds was what is called squeezed out."

"Is that so—and extinct?"

"If ye mane died out, no—there was the chap in India. He came home, I believe, and sold up his commission, or whatever he had, to keep things together. He couldn't sell the old castle and demesne because of some marriage settlement, and as long as his grandmother, old Madame, lived—she's alive still—and besides, there was a lot of missing bonds and leases and deeds as were made away with. The old lady has a fine house in Dublin, and is as grand as ever—mighty high in herself—she's wild

about family, and has a terribly imperious temper. They do say as she never let her own children sit down in her presence. Anyhow, she takes every penny she can claw out of young Desmond, the poor boy. The old place is shut up, and going to rack and ruin ; the grounds has grown wild, and you could graze cattle on the avenues ; the rabbits has the demesne to themselves, the rats has the house. As for the young master, God knows where he is, or how he gets his living ! But this I can swear to, *she's* living on him."

"And the property ?—is it all gone ?"

"There's a receiver over it, for it's in Chancery. Wan small estate was bought by the tenants ; the other, wid the castle and park, cannot be sold, for, as I tell ye, the title-deeds is missing. Only for that, I dare say your honour would get it a bargain."

"Thank you. But from what you tell me I have no desire to hold property in Ireland."

"Faix ! ye might hold it in a worse place. In old days, when there was good markets for stock, the land was a fine stout plank, and held both landlord and tenant nicely. Now there is but barely room for one—the other must drown."

"And that one the original owner of the soil?" remarked Sir Greville, in a sharp key.

"Yes, the old gentry—and some of them were as old as Adam—is being drained out of Ireland by degrees; and maybe it's best so—some says wan thing, some another—but everyone was raal sorry for the Desmonds. They were descended from Princes, and kept Royal state; a fine, open-handed, free-spoken, handsome race. God rest them!"

"I wonder where the Desmond is?" enquired Miss D'Arcy, who had been listening with the liveliest interest. "How I wish he would find a buried treasure and buy back his estates. Has anyone seen him lately?"

"No, me lady, not since he was a young boy. Sure, it would break his heart to see the ruination of his home; an' I doubt if anyone in those parts will ever set eyes on him again."

For a moment there was an impressive silence, interrupted at last by Terence, the coachman, who rose, lifted his hat to the company, and, calling his dog, walked out of the little cabin.

CHAPTER XVI

"CRUMBS"

It turned out to be a lovely evening, and when Miss D'Arcy, Sir Greville, and Mr. Foulcher followed the example of Terence and took leave of Pat, they discovered that a soft tepid atmosphere, a few pools on the road reflecting the sky, a delicate haze hanging over mountain and sea, were all that remained of the storm. The climate of Ireland is as capricious as a woman!

"Extraordinary chap that," remarked Mr. Foulcher, picking his steps with cat-like caution. "A regular type of an old dog who runs with the hare and hunts with the hounds: half hard self-interest, half unquenchable feudal spirit."

"Yes, and in another ten years the last spark of that spirit will be extinct."

"What a pity!" ejaculated Maureen. "The Irish peasants seem such gentlemen—at any

rate, in these wild parts. They stand up when I speak to them, and pull off their caps, and offer to run miles to serve me."

"They don't know the value of time; when they do, it will be different," rejoined Sir Greville. "Dark Rosaleen!" he added, "how beautiful she is, and how poor."

"It's entirely her own fault," sneered Mr. Foulcher.

"Her beauty?"

"No; her poverty, her dirt, and rags. Picturesque, I grant, but she has only herself to thank for her miserable condition."

"There may be two opinions about that," returned Sir Greville, with warmth. "Ireland depends solely on agriculture; and just look here," waving his stick. "Thousands of acres of stony, barren mountains and bog. Picturesque, but not profitable. And where land is fairly good, prices are low; the Irish farmer with his few little beasts is squeezed out, like the Desmonds; foreign competition is the root of the evil. Even the horse trade is going out of his hands."

"I wish the great tourist tribe would set this way," said Maureen. "Ireland's face is her fortune; why should she not turn it to account, like Switzerland?"

"The tourists *are* coming by slow degrees, but prices and accommodation are in need of reform. A London man, accustomed to a French *chef*, does not care about dining on cold bacon and whisky and water ; and I've heard that a lady of exalted rank, staying at a small country hotel, was disturbed at her toilet by the entrance of three or four strangers who had paid the girl sixpence apiece to have a look at her !"

"Good gracious !"

"Yes, but things are improving. There are new and well-appointed hotels rising every day, with some of the Swiss thrift and energy. If the country would sink her differences of class and creed, and if the practical canny north would join hands with the hot-blooded indolent south, and pool their resources of scenery, sport, and native wit, Ireland would soon be wealthy. A splendid gem of the Western ocean !"

"If !" echoed Mr. Foulcher scornfully. "I see you are fond of Ireland."

"Yes ; my wife is Irish—on her father's side."

"Oh, then you are not like the man who never went to church because he had been married there ?"

"But you come to Ireland yourself, Mr.

Foulcher!" flashed out Maureen; "this, you told me, was your seventh visit."

"One often visits people one does not care for personally."

"Really! But why?"

"Because their eccentricities afford amusement."

"You come a long way in search of a very small entertainment."

"That is a matter of opinion, my dear young lady. Little things, you know, amuse little minds. I will not deny that some insignificant events interest me enormously. I see a good deal."

"Mr. Foulcher sees more than most people," asserted Miss D'Arcy, and her eyes sparkled wickedly.

"Yes, there is more instruction and entertainment to be found in the passing events of every day, than in half the novels and plays that were ever written. 'Truth is stranger than fiction.'"

"So I have heard," she retorted; "and lookers-on see most of the game."

"It is a great pity that as we grow older our capacity for enjoyment contracts—one's energy fails, and everything dwindles to a smaller scale."

"Except our bills," interposed Sir Greville,

with the energy of a man who has an extravagant wife.

By this time they had reached the hotel, and, to their amazement, discovered Nita sitting in the porch, looking completely resuscitated and adorably pretty, in all the glories of an elegant new gown.

"Yes, she was all right now; a cup of strong bovril had set her up, and she had been enjoying a delightful talk with Colonel and Mrs. Perry and the girls. It turned out that they knew the Aubérons intimately. How small the world was! By the way, she had been so amused to see Mrs. Duckitt come back, with her smart toque in a pulp, and looking like a drowned cat."

"Rat, you mean," corrected her sister.

"No, dear, I mean *cat*."

At this point the conversation was unexpectedly interrupted. A car with a smoking horse tore up to the door, scattering gravel far and near, and a red-haired young man, wearing a long grey coat, sprang off and entered the verandah.

"Why, I declare it's Lovell!" exclaimed Sir Greville. "I thought he was fishing in Wales. Who would have expected to see him here?" Then, hurrying to greet him—

"Lovell, my dear fellow, this *is* a surprise. What fortunate wind has blown you to these parts?"

Maureen glanced at her sister, who had risen, pink-cheeked and radiant, as she advanced to echo her husband's welcome.

Now she began to understand why Nita had remained at home, and why she had worn her treasured blue muslin. Was she on the brink of one of her special discoveries? The next moment she hated herself for the thought; she was becoming as suspicious as old Fouché. How horrible! Was there such a thing as mental infection? Filled with contrition, she too walked forward, and held out her hand to Mr. Bertram Lovell.

Mr. Bertram Lovell was an idle young man; well off and well connected, if not always well-behaved. He had a sharp, thin, good-looking face, reddish-brown eyes, with a surpassing gift of eloquence, supplemented by a glib and persuasive tongue. He dressed fashionably, danced admirably, and smoked incessantly. He was also a past-master in the art of flirting, and of inferring much whilst saying little. He had flirted as far as the Second Cataract and in the Temples of Karnak. He had philandered under the pines at Simla and in the valleys of

Cashmere. An Atlantic liner had been the scene of a tender friendship, a Norwegian breeze had carried his soft nothings, and the languorous air of Andalusia had heard his (broken) vows. Dowagers with daughters stared straight over his head, and sensitive Benedicks bowed to him with severe formality. All the same, Lovell was popular, especially with bachelors. He was a capital shot, fairly good-natured, and no niggard. Moreover, he could both see a joke and hold his tongue. He enjoyed life thoroughly—society, shooting, travelling—but above all, sunning himself in the smiles of beauty. In the varied experience of his five-and-thirty years he had never been, figuratively speaking, so sunburnt as by the dazzling loveliness of Lady Fanshawe. The shrivelled remains of his heart he laid at her feet, and she had laughed. She smiled at his sentimental speeches, and flouted his compliments. Yet he rose early in order to walk with her in the Row; he intrigued for invitations to meet her; he cut Mrs. Dashaway by her commands, and threw over pressing engagements merely to adore her from a distance in the stalls.

But he had never dared to make open love to her. No, by Jove! although she was the

prettiest woman in London, always cheery, charming, fascinating, and entirely wasted on old Grev, who was undeserving of such grace and beauty, and not *her* sort at all. He was considerably her senior ; he was not a society man ; and if only Mrs. Malpas had left him alone, he would have developed into a useful old bachelor.

Now, *he* would make Nita happy. They had many ideas in common. They hated cats and Wagner ; they adored Paris and Russian caviare ; preferred Jane Hading to Réjane ; and believed in omens and luck. Yes, Nita Fanshawe was his twin soul ; unfortunately, she declined to share this belief, and the last time he had seen her she had flung him, in one breath, a mocking gibe and a long farewell.

And now she had summoned him in a peremptory little note, and he had responded as quickly as steam could bring him. What did it mean ? He trusted that his star was in the ascendant. The only drawback to his success was the ever-haunting presence of Nita's black-browed, straight-laced half-sister, who did not believe in platonic affection, listened to his most brilliant sallies with an unmoved countenance, and presided at his visits in what he called full armour.

Mr. Lovell was immediately invited into

Lady Fanshawe's boudoir, where he was refreshed with tea and smiles ; but Miss D'Arcy remained, offering bread and butter and commonplace remarks, serenely unconscious of the fact that she was *de trop*. Conversation was not as sympathetic and confidential as he had anticipated ; but between the departure of Maureen and the entrance of Sir Greville, the eager traveller had time to breathe one question and snatch a reply.

"I got your letter and came off at once, you see. Why did you send for me?"

"You wrote that you were so shockingly bored where you were. I am bored to death here, so I thought we might as well be bored together."

"On the principle that two negatives make an affirmative? Well, to be with you is something, at any rate," he continued, audaciously. "Even half a loaf is better than no bread."

"Half a loaf, indeed!" she repeated, with a mocking laugh; "nothing of the sort; but if you are very unusually good you may have some *crumbs!*"

CHAPTER XVII

A CHALLENGE

SUNDAY evenings were dedicated to the digestion of the week's news—there were no games except Scriptural riddles and Halma—and after dinner most people sat in the verandah, and conversed in congenial groups.

Lady Fanshawe, with an elaborately frilled cape over her arm, and accompanied by her cavalier—the new arrival—stood on the steps, and contemplated the crowd. Her searching glance soon discovered her spouse; he formed one of a breathless circle who were listening to a blood-freezing ghost story. Sir Greville was drawn up “convenient,” as the Irish say, to Mrs. Duckitt, and his countenance expressed absolute content. Yes, the dinner had been excellent; his cigar was drawing well; he felt at peace with all man- and womankind. Suddenly looking up, his eye encountered Nita's

gaze. "So she was going to take Lovell for a turn, and show him round;" and he gave her a smiling and encouraging nod; but Lady Fanshawe turned pointedly away. Her face was white, her eyes shone with a sort of electric brilliancy, and her pretty lips were tightly compressed as she handed her wrap to Mr. Lovell, and requested him to put it over her shoulders, which he did with an air of tender solicitude and the practised ease of one well accustomed to such duties. Then they set forth, and sauntered down to the bridge, where they rested their elbows on its well-worn parapet, and talked nonsense for the space of two hours.

No one noticed their departure but Mr. Foulcher and Miss D'Arcy; the others—that is to say, the General and his daughter, Mrs. Duckitt, Mrs. and Miss Perry, Captain Willis, and several men—were hanging on the utterances of a handsome dark lady, who was relating a terrible experience with such forcible language and dramatic skill, that she established in some hearts what the French call *une peur blanche*. "Plenty of ghosts hereabouts," proclaimed the General, who was the first to recover from the spell, "only they are called night-workers and fairies. My car-driver

yesterday pointed me out a place between this and Carra—a strip of bog road, desperately lonely—where recently a man was coming home one evening, with his horse and cart—and suddenly noticed a tall fellow keeping up on foot. At last he offered him a lift, which the other accepted in dead silence, and the instant he got on the cart, the horse bolted—it happened to be at the very spot where a farmer had been killed. The *thing* sat on the car, whilst the horse tore through the country like a creature possessed, the driver holding on like grim death, vowing candles and saying his prayers. At last they came to a chapel, and there the spirit left them, with a shriek."

"Spirit, indeed!" echoed Mrs. Duckitt, with a laugh of scorn. "And the name of the spirit was potheen."

"Oh, yes, you may laugh," remarked Mr. Foulcher. "But you cannot laugh at the big stones. I don't mind seeing an apparition, or even giving it a lift to its churchyard, but I can't stand a ghost that mauls you."

"There is no such thing," contended Maureen. "Pray, who has ever had such an experience?"

"Dead men tell no tales," was his significant response.

"Falsehoods, you mean. I don't believe in

ghosts, though I must say I enjoy being thrilled," and she threw a merry glance at the gipsy-like lady.

"Come, then, will you back your opinion?" asked Mr. Foulcher, suddenly sitting erect in his chair.

"Certainly, if it is possible. Where is your spectre, that I may inspect him?"

"You know the hill with the stones—it bears the worst of characters. I left my opera-glasses there this evening, but if you will fetch them back to me here before half-past eleven o'clock, you shall have five pounds for your pet charity."

"Very well, I accept your challenge. I'm perfectly ready," she assented; "it will be a delightful walk. I'll start at ten o'clock."

"And I'll accompany you!" volunteered Mrs. Duckitt. "You cannot object to *me*, Mr. Foulcher; two women are no match for one ghost."

"But one woman is a match for the devil himself," muttered Mr. Foulcher, who particularly disliked the wiry little widow.

"And I will go half-price," she urged, "or shares in the five pounds; in fact, I'd go for nothing. I love an adventure."

At ten o'clock the two ladies set forth,

escorted part of the way by a strong force, and sped with many jokes, playful warnings, and predictions. The stones were a mile distant. To reach them they had to cross the bridge where Nita and her cavalier were still engaged in earnest conversation; so earnest, that the others passed them by wholly unnoticed.

"A friend of your sister's?" asked Mrs. Duckitt, with a backward jerk of her head.

"Yes."

"A great friend?" in a sharper key.

"No; nothing particular; a sort of friend who walks with her in the park, gives her flowers, race badges, and tips at Sandown," and she paused.

"Has he given her anything else?"

"I believe he gave her the influenza. But why do you ask?"

"He knows a cousin of mine, another pretty married woman. I've heard quotations of his sentiments, and I don't admire them."

"May I hear one?"

"Well, only one: 'All is fair in love and war,'" she repeated, expressively. "However, your sister is perfectly safe. Nothing stirs her very deeply; she has no violent emotions."

"Except jealousy," said Maureen to herself.

"And I notice that there is a close affection between you ; you, dear, impulsive, clear-headed Maureen, give out far more than you receive—it's your nature."

"Mrs. Duckitt, you overwhelm me. I ought to make you a deep court-curtsey here in the middle of the road."

"You give your sister tenfold for what she returns you. Some day you will give your love in the same measure."

"And don't you think it will be returned? Oh," and she laughed, "how humiliating! But it is no great matter, for I shall never be married."

"Of course you will be married, for although you have neither your sister's lovely face nor her fortune, I can imagine a man being stirred to gallant deeds for the sake of Maureen D'Arcy. You will marry before you are twenty-three; I see myself at your wedding in a new French frock, and I'll give you—let me think."

"A fishing-rod," suggested the girl, saucily.

"No, a silver tea-kettle."

"Thank you very, very much, Mrs. Duckitt. A silver kettle! I'll note that as my first wedding present; the next thing is to find the bridegroom."

"You may have met him already, without knowing that he is your fate."

"Dear me! what a pity! That takes away all the romance. I should like to be able to say, 'Here comes my fate'—and perhaps he has danced with me, and said it was a frightful crush, or he may have merely passed me under an umbrella, or sat next me in a theatre, and——"

"And here we are," interrupted Mrs. Duckitt. "What a glorious prospect, what a situation for sweethearts! 'Never the hour, and the place, and the loved one all together,'" she quoted, as she gazed down from the grassy plateau, surrounded with loose stone walls.

"And there are Mr. Foulcher's opera-glasses," announced Maureen. "I must say we have earned our five pounds cheaply."

"Yes. And what shall we do with it?"

"Give it to some of the poor old people in the village. Half-a-sovereign apiece will make ten of them happy."

"I wish half-a-sovereign would make *me* happy," said Mrs. Duckitt. And she heaved a quick sigh.

But Maureen was scarcely listening, she was gazing at the long white road—the bridge. Ah! they were moving at last! and soon became merged into one little dot in the far,

far distance. What had brought that odious Mr. Lovell to Ballybay? What could he and Nita find to discuss for two mortal hours?

"I don't believe we shall have any adventure to-night!" grumbled Mrs. Duckitt, as she seated herself on the wall. "There isn't even a stray cow. Adventures are to the adventurous! Have you ever had any experiences—ghosts, burglars, accidents? Do tell me something, dear; it is too early to go back, and it's perfectly heavenly sitting here."

"The nearest approach to an adventure I ever had," replied Maureen, adjusting the glasses over her shoulder, "was being bushed, when I was about fourteen."

"Bushed?" repeated Mrs. Duckitt. "I've heard of people being up a tree. I suppose bushed is the same thing?"

"No, it means being lost in the bush, which is ten times worse. I was always wild about riding, and very independent. My poor mother was killed when I was a year old—a log-jump out hunting—and I became father's companion. You know, Nita is the daughter of his first wife, and was brought up in England."

"And no one would dream that you are sisters."

"No; isn't she lovely? Her mother was

English, and extremely pretty and graceful. She loathed Colonial life—died of it, I believe. My mother, on the contrary, was Colonial-born, Irish, devoted to horses and animals ; she died when she was twenty-two, not much older than I am"—as she spoke a wistful expression dawned in her daughter's eyes. " But about my adventure. There was a beautiful mare, very wild and mad, called Frantic. She went quietly with me, and I was immensely proud of the fact that she had never once got me off. One day I started to ride her to a station twenty miles away—a mere morning gallop. Father asked me not to take her, but I insisted ; I was always headstrong, I'm sorry to say. She went like a rocking-horse till about half way, when a bird frightened her ; she stopped in full stride—propped—bucked ; I was unprepared, and away I went. So did she. She kicked up her heels, and left me sitting there in the track, feeling and looking extremely foolish. If she had gone home I would have been all right, but she went on the run instead, and they thought I'd stayed with our neighbours. Well, I shall never forget that night as long as I live. Alone in the bush, nothing to eat or drink, no weapon but a riding-crop! —I was silly enough to cry. The thirst was

so dreadful, and the bush seemed full of terrible creatures of my imagination. I was missed, and searched for next day; scores of people were out looking for me—I'd been lost twenty hours, and was nearly dead, and so was poor father. That was about my only adventure. Do not the bay and lake look lovely?" she exclaimed. "They are both fast asleep—or, rather, the sea is dozing—it never really sleeps—but the lake is in the land of dreams. Time for us to go home and follow its example."

"Hush!" cried Mrs. Duckitt, authoritatively. "Hush!"

"What! are you afraid I shall wake it?" and she laughed a hearty girlish laugh.

"Be quiet—sit down!" insisted her companion, suddenly gripping her arm. "I hear voices—listen—look! there—near that tree in the hollow; don't you see—two figures, two men coming straight here?"

"Yes; I see them, a man and a boy; they have a dog with them, so they are not ghosts. What do you wish to do? We can't run away, it would be too ignominious!"

"Too late to run; let us creep to the dark side of the wall, and hold our breath! I am sure they are up to no good, coming here at such an hour?"

"They might say the same of *us*," retorted the girl, but already Mrs. Duckitt was crawling away on her hands and knees in the direction of the biggest stones.

Maureen followed her, walking erect, and feeling an irresistible desire to laugh.

"I suppose you have no weapon of any sort?" whispered her companion, and her lips twitched spasmodically.

"No," she replied, coiling down beside her, "nothing but a good strong hat-pin. You don't mean to say that you are frightened? I feel as if we were playing at hide-and-seek!"

But Mrs. Duckitt's only answer was a shudder.

CHAPTER XVIII

WHAT THE LISTENERS HEARD

MRS. DUCKITT wore a clinging black evening gown, and her companion, dressed entirely in white, was consequently a far more noticeable object; but as they crouched behind one of the Druidical stones it was Mrs. Duckitt's heart which was beating in hurried thumps—even louder, to her ears, than the steadily approaching footfalls that were advancing nearer and nearer, like some inexorable fate! Suddenly the steps ceased, and Maureen ventured to reconnoitre with one cautious eye round the corner of their lair. Two men were standing by the low wall, within twenty feet of them, and Mrs. Duckitt gave a violent start when a loud, grating voice demanded—

“An' now we are here—*what* is it?”

“Well, Joey, my boy, I couldn't get a word wid you at the cross, the girls were crowding

around you, like flies at the honey, and as I want no listeners, I giv' ye the office to push on to the stones, where we are sure of having the place to ourselves!"

"Ye may well say that—sure no one would come within a square mile of it after ten o'clock, and, bedad, I thought I saw a sort of white thing just now!"

"Ah, go long wid ye; who believes them old woman's tales?"

"A power of people, and 'tis well known as more nor wan has met with their death hereabouts! But sure 'twasn't to talk of spirits as I am out of me bed. Let us sit down. I've on a pair of boots as is fairly ating the feet off me. Come, what's up?"

"Faix, I'll soon tell you," answered the other, with a preparatory cough. "Do you know Terence, the coachman?"

"Do I know the nose on me face?" demanded Joey, with angry scorn.

"Ye've seen Judy Flood, of Caher. She's got two thousand pounds to her fort'n, though, God knows, she's no beauty, and is getting a bit stale now!"

"No; but two thousand pounds is a mighty pretty sum. An' what ails her?" asked the man with the grating voice.

"She's losing her mind over that chap Terence, as won't so much as look at her, though she gets her clothes in Cork, and is a grand singer, and can play the concertina with the best. She writes to him; she stops him on the road, quite bold-faced; she spends a fortune riding on the coach, and she is just wasting away; but he won't even spake to her, and she is fairly wild."

"She's a fool for her pains! Sure he never spakes to any woman, he's teetotally taken up with horses. Bedad, she's not the only girl that would like to make up wid Terence—he is a well-looking fellow."

"Just so, and I mane to spoil his beauty. As long as he is in the country Judy Flood won't spake to me; but wance I'm shut ov him, it will be plain sailing."

"Man alive! but what's the use of talking? He has no notion av stirring. He is the finest driver on the road, and well paid. The company thinks a power of him, and he is as steady as the Rock of Cashel—never touches a drop av anything, so you can't get him into trouble through drink. What's yer plan?"

Again Maureen peeped anxiously round the stone, and saw the two figures well defined in the moonlight—a tall, heavy-looking man in

his Sunday suit; the other a powerful dwarf, with a great head, prodigious shoulders and arms—in fact, the body of a Hercules set on two little bandy legs.

“Me plan is this,” proclaimed the taller, “that I giv’ ye ten pounds into yer fist to get Terence out av the country, alive or dead.”

“Is it ten pounds?” repeated the dwarf with a loud, derisive laugh. “Ten pounds for the chance of him killing me, or getting me nice little neck stretched in Cork Jail? *Ten* pounds!”

“Well, fifteen?”

“An’ what’s fifteen for the risk, and you getting two thousand? Ye must open yer mouth, me son!”

“You’re such a clever chap, and cute as a pet fox; wid a long head on you—you can arrange an’ settle him nicely.”

“Ah, hould on wid your sluthering and flattering. Do ye take me for a girl? *Words* is chape.”

“Well, then, twenty, and divil another shilling I’ll rise; knock him down at twenty.”

“Wid two pounds on account, and a gallon of whisky?”

“Wid two pounds on account, and a gallon of whisky.”

"Here goes, then," and the dwarf spat into his palm, and held out his hand to clench the bargain.

"I've me own little account to settle wid Master Terence—handsome as he is."

"Then in that case you should take off half."

But the dwarf scornfully ignored this suggestion as he resumed: "Ye mind when I was in the coach stables a while back as helper? Terence he's a stern master, and neither spares himself nor no one; he comes round a-looking after every single baste, no matter how late he is, and one evening I'd had a drop, and he caught me bating the little black horse wid a pitch-fork—faix, I put his eye out, I'll not deny—but I tell ye, *he* sobered me, he was that mad! And says he, 'I can't thrash you—but off you go! Never come inside these stables as long as you live'; and wid that he turned me out wid his own two hands. So he lost me me fine comfortable situation, ye see, and I owe him *that*; I tell ye, I could tear the flesh off his bones if I got the chance."

"And what's yer plan, Joey, me darlin'?"

"Shootin' is dangerous, but accidents, especially coach accidents, on a wild dark night, comes in very natural and handy."

"No, faix; what about the other people on the coach?"

"Augh, them's sure to be only Britishers—let them take their chance. The night coach to Shule next week, there's no moon till twelve; at Scanlan's corner there's a sharp turn. I'll put a good stout rope across the road, and I'll engage to upset the coach elegantly."

"No, begob!" cried Jim, with emphasis, "I don't mind spoiling the beauty of Terence, nor even breaking his neck, though I've no *real* grudge against him, for he is a quiet, dacent boy, and we used to be real friendly till Judy set eyes on him; but, bedad, I'll have no hand or part in upsetting a whole coach, and maybe killing half-a-dozen people. I have a sowl to save, if you haven't."

"Oh! then, since ye are so saintly," sneered the dwarf, "I'll just drop a rock on him, and quench him for good and all. Them rocks above Beriana Road are as loose as can be; a sneeze would start them—they weigh tons. Terence goes by once a week to the company's farm, riding or walking, always late and alone. I'll manage it nicely; accidental death," and he laughed an odd, shrill laugh. "And when it's all over, I'll come here for me money, and you'll console Judy! I suppose there's no fear

av her taking it to heart, and going into a convent? Where would ye be then, me fine fellow?"

"No fear at all. *She's no Vocheen.* This time twelve months I was making great running, and so was Pat the Slater; and she was swithering between us as to which she'd have. Now Pat is married, and I'd have it all me own way. Come here, Crab, ye fool" (to the dog); "what the divil are yer after?"

Crab, who had been sniffing round, now suddenly discerned the two listeners, and set up a furious barking.

"Faix, he has found something—a hedgehog, I'll go bail."

"Stay quite quiet," whispered Maureen, as she suddenly rose, whisked the skirt of her dress over her head, and holding it so as to conceal her face she sprang out, and ran swiftly towards the paralyzed conspirators.

"Oh, what's this at all? Oh, Holy Mary!" yelled the dwarf, dropping off the wall. "Oh, thunder and fury!—Eyah, here it comes!" and roaring with terror he sped down the hill as fast as his little legs would carry him. For one critical instant his confederate stood his ground bravely. Yes, it was an important moment, but Maureen boldly advanced with a

piercing "Coo-ee," and in a second he and his dog had followed their leader.

"They are gone," she gasped triumphantly, "and I don't think they will come back in a hurry. It was our only chance. Did you see how they ran?—the dwarf especially—in spite of his boots."

"Oh, my dear Maureen!" faltered Mrs. Duckitt, "you are certainly the bravest girl I've ever seen! Now I can understand how you came to drive the coach. Do let us get away at once! I consider that we have earned our five pounds handsomely! I'm trembling from head to foot." Her breath came in quick, short gasps. "Give me your hand, child, and help me over the wall. I feel as if I had aged fifty years. Oh, just look—one has stopped."

"I'll soon hurry him," cried Maureen, and she sprang on a boulder, and waved her arms vigorously.

"What a pair of ruffians!" continued Mrs. Duckitt. "What an adventure! If they had found us that time, knowing we had overheard *all*, I believe the dwarf would have murdered us."

"We had better keep the experience to ourselves."

"Of course, we must let the coachman know."

"Yes, of course," assented Maureen, "and as soon as possible ; but how ? Will you write ?"

"I cannot say it well in a letter. No, I'll send him a note, and ask him to come and speak to me, and tell him the whole plot, face to face ; I think that will be best."

It was half-past eleven when the two ladies entered the hall, and found quite a large party awaiting them, with expectant smiles. Mrs. Duckitt, usually so gay and communicative, looked pale and haggard, but Miss D'Arcy at once handed Mr. Foulcher his opera-glasses, saying, "Well, you see we have returned quite safely, after all. You owe us five pounds."

"And you saw no ghosts ?"

"No, indeed ; on the contrary, I think we were taken for ghosts ourselves, and have given the place a fresh reputation. And now, as we are very, very sleepy, we are going to bed—good night," and, arm in arm, she and her companion passed upstairs.

* * * * *

"Have you written the note for the coachman ?" asked Maureen, as she met Mrs. Duckitt in the hall the following morning, accoutred for fishing.

"No, I declare I forgot all about it ! I overslept myself this morning, I was so tired—

so worn-out—and I'm dreadfully late. There are the boatmen waiting, looking volumes of reproach."

"But don't you think that you ought to write even a line before you start? Come into the drawing-room. I'll see that it is despatched."

Mrs. Duckitt sat down and impatiently seized the blotter which had been opened for her, and looking up at her companion, asked:—

"How do I begin—'Dear Sir,' or 'Mrs. Duckitt wishes to see Mr. Terence,' or 'Mrs. Duckitt presents her compliments'?"

" 'Mrs. Duckitt will feel much obliged——' "

"Yes"—beginning to scribble. "Only, I am going to oblige him. Don't you think we ought to tell the police?"

"I think we will leave that to his discretion."

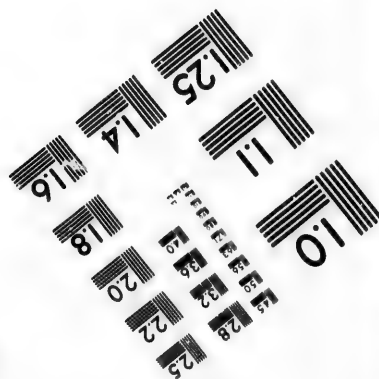
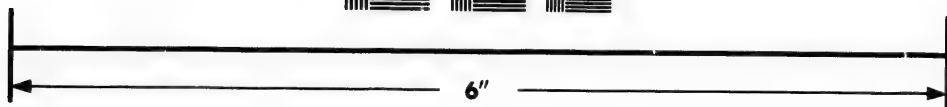
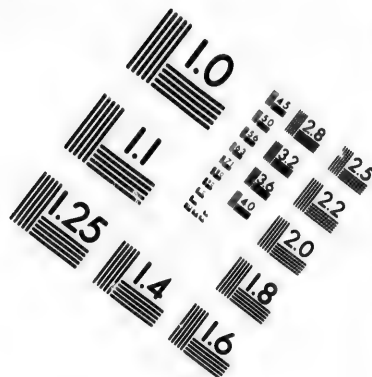
"Here, will this do?" handing over the note:—

"Mrs. Duckitt will be much obliged if Mr. Terence will call on her this evening before dinner, as she wishes to see him on important business. Should Mrs. Duckitt be detained, Miss D'Arcy will represent her."

"You had much better not have said that," protested Maureen.

"It's only in case of accidents—in case there





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is a rise on, and we have a good day ; really, I cannot pin myself down to be back before sunset."

"Not even to warn a man of a plot against his life?" and her eyes sparkled.

"No, not when I know that you can do it quite as well, and, indeed, only for your nerve, and holding me so tightly in your arms, I should have screamed, and we should never have heard the plot at all! I'll be back if possible. Now I must be off, dear. You get one of the servants to run over with it. I'm shockingly late," and she handed the note to Maureen, and hurried out of the room.

Maureen examined the envelope, on which was scrawled: "To Mr. Terence, at Macgill's. To be delivered immediately."

Then she went out into the hall, where she caught sight of Lizzie, and holding up the note, said, "Lizzie, I want you to run an errand ; it will not take you a moment. Go up to Macgill's, and give that to Terence the coachman at once."

"All right, miss," assented Lizzie, who, having received the missive, deliberately straightened her cap, turned her apron, and as she walked very slowly out of the door concentrated her attention on spelling the superscription.

Maureen took her letters and book into the verandah, where there was no one but Mr. Foulcher, and one or two tourists who were merely passing through.

"Well, Miss D'Arcy," said the little man, in a genial tone, "no worse for your late walk last night?"

"No worse, thank you," passing him, and seating herself at some distance.

"Going to the picnic?" following her, and drawing up a chair.

"Yes, I think so."

"May I offer you a lift?"

"No, thank you; I am going to ride with Mr. Stevenage."

"His poor steed! I declare, when I see him on horseback I always think of an elephant working out a term of hard labour."

"Yes, I pity his horse sincerely, but I shall take good care that he does not go out of a walk. Indeed, I pity most horses. Look at that poor white animal in the cart—age, sorrow, sickness are written on every line of its body. He makes me think of the horses in the Apocalypse."

Mr. Foulcher leant back in his chair, placed his finger-tips neatly together, and smiled superior.

"In another fifty years—thanks to electricity—horses will be as extinct as the mastodon—nothing to be found of them but their bones."

"Bones!" repeated Mr. Foulcher, with unexpected animation. "Look here, Miss D'Arcy, you are a type of the modern woman—intelligent, travelled, advanced; pray, what are your ideas about cremation?"

"I've never given the matter a thought."

"Then, the sooner you do so the better."

"Do you really think so? What a graceful compliment!"

"No, no, no," waving both hands impatiently. "You know what I mean. I can assure you that I've made *my* arrangements years ago, and left due orders to be cremated with seven pounds of saltpetre, one pound of charcoal, half a pound of brimstone, and no religious ceremony."

"It sounds like a thing out of a cookery book——"

"Miss D'Arcy," interrupted Lizzie, accosting her breathlessly, "I took your note to Macgill's. Terence is away on the early coach. As soon as he comes back, Mrs. Macgill will give him your letter into his hands, as you said it was to be delivered at wance."

Mr. Foulcher listened to this speech with an

expression of incredulous amazement, and then gradually subsided behind his newspaper; not so much to absorb its contents, as to assimilate in his own mind this unexpected and delicious morsel of scandal! So Miss D'Arcy, the cold, the proud, the reserved, was sending sly notes to the good-looking coachman, was she?

CHAPTER XIX

A SUBSTITUTE

THERE was a sharp rap at Miss D'Arcy's door, and in reply to her "Yes?" Lizzie thrust her foxy head inside, and whispered, with the air of a fellow-conspirator, "He is here now, miss—*Terence, ye know.*"

"All right," replied the young lady, who had been taking off her habit. "Has Mrs. Duckitt returned?"

"No; sorra a sign of her."

"Very well. I'll be down directly; please ask him in to wait.—I shall have to do it, and it's really too bad of her," she said to herself, as she hastily fastened a brooch and snatched up her bangles.

In five minutes she was in the hall, where she found the coachman reading one of the framed time-tables, as, hat in hand, he awaited her.

"Mrs. Duckitt wished to see me," he began, without preamble.

"Yes, but as she has not yet returned, I must be her substitute. Please come outside and I will speak to you." And Miss D'Arcy swiftly led the way, past the verandah, through a side gate, which opened into a large, railed-in enclosure, and several grass tennis-courts. Here she came to a halt, turned about, and confronted her bewildered companion.

"I've something to say to you that I don't wish other people to hear," she began abruptly.

Her listener now realized, once for all, what is meant by a man's breath being completely taken away.

He looked at her quickly, then at Lizzie, who was hanging out of a back window.

"About a horse, miss?" he said, in a matter-of-fact voice. As he spoke his face was perfectly unmoved.

"Not at all," rather haughtily. "It concerns yourself."

"Concerns myself?" he repeated, regarding her so searchingly that her eyes fell for a second under that piercing gaze. "I think there must be some mistake," he concluded slowly.

"No. There is no mistake at all. There

is a plot against your life. I won't detain you, but please listen to what I have to say. You *must* be told." He bowed his head, and she continued nervously :—

"Last night Mr. Foulcher challenged me to go to the stones and face the ghost. I went, accompanied by Mrs. Duckitt. It was so lovely sitting there in the moonlight that we stayed quite a long time. Just as we were about to turn homewards we noticed two men approaching. Mrs. Duckitt was dreadfully frightened and insisted on our hiding. These men came and sat on the wall close to us. One is called Joey—he is a dwarf; the other is Jimmy Hogan."

"I know them both well."

"We heard distinctly every word they said. Hogan is desperately jealous of some woman called Judy Flood, who—who—" (here she blushed vividly) "likes you, and he is most anxious to get you out of the way."

"Very kind of him indeed, but easier said than done."

"So he appeared to fear, and he has summoned the dwarf to his assistance."

"The dwarf is a bad lot," commented her companion.

"Indeed he is, for after long haggling, and

in consideration of a gallon of whisky and an old grudge, he has agreed to get rid of you for good—to quench you, as he expressed it, for twenty pounds.”

“And dead cheap, considering the risk.”

“I beg you won’t jeer,” she exclaimed impatiently, for this seemed a too flippant manner of treating a subject so serious. “The date is some night next week, when there is no moon, and you will be coming back alone from the farm. There are some rocks you have to pass under—you will never pass them alive.”

“And so that is the plot?” he remarked, after a short silence.

“Yes, as it stands amended by Hogan. Joey’s first idea was a dark night, a stout rope across the road, and to upset the coach.”

The coachman’s eyes flashed; with difficulty he swallowed down a bad word, and Miss D’Arcy resumed:—

“We thought we would let you know at once, and you can inform the police. Mrs. Duckitt said we had better keep aloof.”

“There is no question of that; I’ll make it all right.” A pause. “I shall never forget what I owe to you two ladies. I am not a man of many words—I wish I could give you deeds.”

"Have you forgotten how you came to our rescue on the coach?"

"No," he answered, with a curious smile, "I shall always remember that day. I—I——" he was about to add more, but checked the words on his lips. She glanced at him interrogatively, and he continued in a totally different key, "I am wondering how it happened that you were not discovered? Joey the dwarf has ears that can hear the grass grow."

"We were on the point of being betrayed by a dog; he found us, and began to bark furiously."

"And then what happened?"

"Then the two wretches thought he had unearthed a hedgehog, and when I saw them getting off the wall, I threw the skirt of my dress over my head, and made a rush at them. They instantly fled down the hill, tumbling over one another, and shouting a mixture of curses and prayers."

Terence's smile gradually broadened, till at last he gave way to a hearty laugh.

"There is no doubt that you have a daring spirit and a stout heart, and the stones will have a worse reputation than ever. Do you never lose your presence of mind?"

"Not often; but it is unlucky to boast," and

as she spoke she leant against the palings and contemplated the tip of her dainty shoe. Miss D'Arcy seemed to have a natural gift for falling into a graceful pose. As she stood there in her white gown she made a charming picture.

"You, however, have lost something to-day," and she looked up at him with a sudden smile.

The coachman's expression became grave and watchful as he replied—

"Yes! I have parted with a good deal in my time—but what have I lost to-day?"

"Don't you miss it?" she asked, with a glint of malice; "up till the last ten minutes you have always spoken with a rich Kerry accent—the Kerry accent reminds me somehow of smoked cream. Pray tell me, *what* has become of your brogue?"

For a moment he stood mute and utterly astonished. Then he met her eyes bravely, and admitted, in his coolest tones—

"By Jove, yes! I see there is no use in playing the ostrich with you, and I may as well admit that, like the traditional landlady, I have seen better days. Here in Ballybay I pass unquestioned as a decent, respectable young man who knows his place. How is it that you have—shall I say?—detected me?"

"Call it what you please," with a quick

gesture of her hand that made her bangles tinkle. "The answer is perfectly simple. Because I'm accustomed to seeing gentlemen in unusual situations. Some of my father's stock-riders and shepherds were well-born men who had come down in the world. One was an Oxford undergraduate, who was extremely cultured and had delightful manners, but the moment he got his quarterly cheque he went away to an inn twenty miles off and stayed there till it was all spent—it generally lasted about eight days. Such a pity; such a wasted life!"

"You may well say so," he assented gravely.

"They had most of them got into trouble about money—or other matters," she continued. "Still, they could not disguise their voices; nor can you—though you do the brogue as to the manner born."

"Why not? I am an Irishman. As I have disguised my voice, I suppose you think that I, too, have got into trouble about money—or other matters," and his eyes betrayed a gleam of amusement.

"I beg your pardon," and she coloured to the roots of her hair. "I am notorious for saying the wrong thing. You must think me an incorrigibly inquisitive and ill-bred girl."

"No; I should not recognise you under either of those names," was his courteous rejoinder.

"As a child, I was constantly discovering things that never occurred to my elders."

"*L'enfant terrible!*—how popular you must have been!"

"Well, people on the run *did* like me—for I never told tales."

"Then, as you have found me out, I hope you will not give me away. Will you be good enough to keep my secret?"

"Certainly. It is so minute that I shall have no difficulty in concealing it."

"And, since a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, I may add that I am the son of a gentleman and a public school boy. I've been in the Service too, and once I looked forward to playing a hand in the big game of life." He hesitated for a second. "But circumstances have compelled me to take a back seat. I am not even a looker-on—save from a coach-box."

"Surely you could have done better than that?" she exclaimed.

"Oh, I am not so badly off. Lots of gentlemen are driving hansom in London, or cattle in the colonies. I prefer my present situation to a monotonous indoor billet. I have open

air, plenty to do, I am fond of horses, and—base detail—I am well paid.”

“Still, I am surprised you did not go farther afield: there are so many careers open to a man. Were *I* a man, I should find it difficult to choose,—but I believe I’d go to Africa.”

“Yes, and so would I; but, you see, I have another to think of.”

“Then, I wonder you do not bring her down here! You must find it lonely.”

“How quickly you concluded that the other was a woman! You are right, though! Bring her down here is a different affair; establish her at Macgill’s!” here he laughed aloud. “I fancy I see her face and hear her criticisms. She has never roughed it, and has always been accustomed to carriages and servants, boundless extravagance, and fine feathers.”

Maureen looked at him gravely; her colour rose, her eyes sparkled coldly.

“Yes, I understand,” she observed quietly. “Someone much too smart for poor little Ballybay.”

“You are right again,” he assented with triumph. “She has no idea that *I* am here; if she guessed, I believe she would be down like a shot, and we would have the devil to pay

—I beg your pardon—I mean tremendous scenes. She is——”

“Miss D’Arcy,” said a silken voice close behind her. She turned and discovered Mr. Foulcher, who had approached noiselessly in his evening shoes.

“Mrs. Duckitt is searching for you everywhere. I am sorry to—um—interrupt you; but—” and he looked from her to the coachman, “a—a—a——” and the smile on his face was not quite pleasant to see.

“Thank you, Mr. Foulcher,” she answered, with a little airy nod. “If you had called out the number of my room, as the hotel boys do in London, I should have run in at once, and saved you all this”—a scarcely perceptible pause—“trouble. I think Mr. Terence and I have quite finished all we had to say to one another,” and as she spoke she glanced at him with a pair of frozen blue eyes, bowed as to her social equal, and went indoors.

By this move the coachman and Mr. Foulcher were left face to face, a position which was of short duration, for the former, with a civil “Good-night, sir,” put his hands on the railings, cleared them, and decamped, leaving little Foulcher the field to himself.

Little Fouché had been watching the *titie-à-*

tête—needless to say, with the deepest interest—through the end window of the corridor. At first the couple had been stiff and formal, then of one mind; after that they had laughed; next they had become confidential. Now the young lady had withdrawn into herself, looking divinely dignified; something had affronted her and roused her spirit and pride.

“I’d give a good deal to know what they have been talking about,” he muttered, as he stroked his chin reflectively. “Upon my word, it was the most barefaced thing I ever saw! In full view of all the back windows! If that girl has money, he will run off with her—and that’s as sure as my name is Simon;” and with this prophecy on his lips, Mr. Foulcher slowly re-entered the hotel.

CHAPTER XX

WEATHER-BOUND

AUGUST had waned into September, September itself was half spent, and still Ballybay was full, whether of tourists, visitors, artists, or serious and industrious fisher-folk. Mr. Lovell had proved to be a shameless impostor; he boated with Lady Fanshawe, but he never threw a line. His companion, carrying the notorious red parasol, afforded a too well-known feature and landmark. Their boat exhibited neither rods nor tackle, but contained cushions, books, luncheon, and cigarettes; the lotus-eaters drifted lazily about, occasionally landing for tea or a stroll, and greatly scandalizing the weather-beaten, grave-eyed natives. If the couple had fished, well and good; but just straggling and idling was "not respectable," according to their stern domestic code.

Sir Greville and Mrs. Duckitt were another

pair, the keenest of the keen ; they shared boat and cars, and enjoyed excellent sport, especially in the river, when the lady waded up to her knees as staunchly as any man. Many a fine salmon-trout did the partners bring home ; and little, little did poor Sir Greville guess what a pretty kettle of fish was brewing for his benefit ! Maureen—the odd one out—was left entirely to her own resources ; she read, and rode, or roamed about on foot—high among the mists and purple heather, or amid glades of myrtle and arbutus, or around the shores and sandy coves, where the brown seals clustered. Once she attended a country dance, and played the fiddle, with the pensioner for her chaperon, and a proud, proud man was he ! She executed jigs till her arms ached, and it was agreed on all hands that the English girl could twist a reel out of a fiddle as well as Dandy Cox himself.

It had always been considered a notable feat to make an expedition to the Skelligs—those two lone islands, once the resort of saints, now the home of sea-birds, that lie off the coast of Ireland. To reach them was a toilsome day's row, a heavy pull amongst the long Atlantic rollers, which the boat encountered the moment she abandoned the shelter of the bay. Maureen had accomplished the trip early in the season

with a merry party, and complete success. It now remained for her relatives to do likewise. Sir Greville and his wife, Mrs. Duckitt, and at least half-a-dozen other enterprising spirits, chartered a large boat, ordered luncheon, and made all preparations for their voyage, including the order to be called at five in the morning.

At five in the morning Lady Fanshawe arose and looked out; the bay was not *quite* like glass, and her faint heart failed her. She had heard such woeful stories of the difficulties of landing on the islands, and how occasionally people had been weather-bound there for weeks.

"It doesn't look a good day," she objected, in a plaintive key.

"It is as good a day as we shall get now," rejoined Sir Greville; "you'll be sorry not to have seen the Skelligs—they are an uncommon sight. The lighthouse-keeper's wife will look after you; and even if you can't get back to-night, it will be an adventure."

"But I hate adventures, and I loathe boat-ing! Fancy an open boat on the wide Atlantic; I'm sure I should feel as if I had been shipwrecked! No, no, I'll stay with Maureen! Go, dear, and enjoy yourself. Ugh, how cold it is!" and Lady Fanshawe threw off her dressing-gown, and crept back into bed.

"Well, good-bye. Mark my words," said Sir Greville, who was a little vexed with such an unenterprising wife; "mind what I say, Nita—you will be sorry you did not come," and he went out, shutting the door rather loudly.

The party, nine in all, set forth in extravagant spirits—considering the early hour. They were expected back at sundown, but during the afternoon the wind rose menacingly, and legions of white horses invaded the bay. At ten o'clock, there being no sign of the boat, the dinner table was cleared, and the proprietor, who was most experienced in all matters respecting sailing, fishing, and shooting, volunteered it as his opinion that the party were stuck on the Skelligs for the night, and this he announced as coolly as if it were an everyday occurrence.

"But I really do not see why they could not come back," protested Lady Fanshawe, in a peevish voice.

"Well, my lady, if you saw the Skelligs with a heavy sea on, and the big Atlantic breaking and thundering round as if it was going to swallow them, you'd understand that no boat could get away."

"I suppose they are certain to come tomorrow morning?"

"Depends on the weather, my lady. If it is better, well and good; if it's worse——"

"What?" she asked in a cross voice

"You need not be uneasy. They will be all right. They are a pleasant party—nine of them—there's accommodation at the Skelligs, and plenty of rough food. Anyway, they took away as much lunch as would feed them well for three days. I know Mrs. Duckitt has a pack of cards, and Captain Willis took his banjo, so I expect they will put in a very good time."

Unwittingly, the proprietor had fired a mine, for when Lady Fanshawe called her sister into her bedroom in order to confer with her as they brushed their hair, she began at once.

"Upon my word, it's too absurd, all those silly grown-up people stuck on a little island playing at Robinson Crusoe, and glad of the excuse."

"It is terribly rough, Nita. Just listen to the wind. I'm sure you would stay if you were among them."

"Which, thank goodness, I'm not. I was wise for once. One thing is quite certain, that if Grev does not turn up to-morrow by twelve, I shall be extremely annoyed."

"With the elements, or with him?"

"With him, of course," she answered angrily.

"You may be certain that he will return if he can. No one would care to spend more than a day on the Skelligs. Listen!" springing to her feet, "I do believe they have come. Do you hear all that tramping and talking below? What a good thing we had not begun to undress."

As Maureen spoke she opened the door, which admitted the sound of many tongues all declaiming together, and ran to the top of the landing. Lady Fanshawe hurried after her, and looked down into the hall. Yes, there were the travellers, considerably the worse for high winds, salt water, and boisterous weather, but loud, self-assertive, cheery, and boastful.

They had "done" the Skelligs in one day, and felt as if they had each paid a big bill and had the receipt in their pockets.

As they tramped into the dining-room in single file—ravenous, despite the three days' provisions—Nita, leaning over her sister, began to breathe rather quickly. She could only count *seven*!—seven damp, dishevelled people. And where were the other two? Where was Grev? Where was Mrs. Duckitt? She flew downstairs, swept into the midst of the party, and accosted Mrs. Perry, who had just settled down comfortably to a bowl of soup.

"Oh, my dear," she began at once, "I'm so sorry we could not wait for them."

"What? Have you left them behind?"

"Yes. The sea was getting up, and we were really obliged to come away."

"Why?" demanded Lady Fanshawe, in a sharp key.

"You see,"—here Mrs. Perry deliberately took two spoonfuls of soup,—“your husband and Mrs. Duckitt went roaming after lunch, and when we had all seen the monks' cells and everything, I believe they went to fish, or look for eggs; excessively foolish, I must say, when we had been warned to make an early start, as the wind had suddenly changed, and the sea was getting up. Getting up, indeed! It *got* up. I shall never forget it. Over and over again I thought the boat would have capsized. You were wise not to go, Lady Fanshawe; and you too, Mr. Lovell,” nodding to Lovell, who had seated himself at table in order to listen to the day's doings.

"Oh, I never take part in these adventurous expeditions," he answered, coolly. "I hate excursions and alarms. I don't risk being wrecked, burnt alive, or cast away. I much prefer hearing of these fatalities, or reading about them in the local paper."

Mrs. Perry went on with her soup during this speech ; then she turned to Lady Fanshawe, and said in her most impressive manner :

"We really waited half an hour for those people, and the wind rising every minute. At last we came off. You see, we were seven to two."

"Mrs. Duckitt told me she had two pairs of stockings with her, and a fishing-line," put in Miss Perry across the table. "I expect the coastguard's wife will look after them and make them comfortable."

"To be sure she will," assented Captain Willis. "She seemed a rattling good sort."

"Don't take it to heart, Lady Fanshawe," he added, glancing at her set white face and glittering eyes. "They don't *deserve* your pity. I bet you anything you like that they are as jolly as sand-boys, and perfectly happy where they are."

Nita made no reply beyond a sort of frozen smile, but, with a glance at her sister, rose from her place and returned to her room, figuratively in a blue flame.

Maureen hurried up almost at her heels, but she was just a moment too late ; the door was already shut, and locked.

CHAPTER XXI

THE EMPTY NEST

FAR from abating, the storm hourly grew worse, the west wind shrieked to a deafening degree, then gradually died away in hoarse mutterings and broken sobs among the hills. Fishing, even on the lakes, was out of the question—no craft but a lifeboat could live among the towering waves of the bay, and what were these to the racing mountains of the wild Atlantic?

But Lady Fanshawe angrily refused to consider the weather, and remained unreasonable, petulant, and injured, whilst the artful Lovell seized the opportunity to spread his snares, and loaded her with hot-house flowers, solicitude, and sympathy! She dressed her face in a woe-begone expression, her figure in sad colours, and spent much of her time in the seclusion of her own sitting-room, where she poured into her sister's ears a flood of passionate complaints.

Maureen was nearly at her wits' end to amuse and appease her.

"If Grevy really cared for me, he would never have been left behind"—this was the keynote of all her lamentations.

"I am positive he did not want to stay; no man in his senses would remain on the Skelligs," argued his advocate.

"But he is not in his senses, and it was all done on purpose—a deeply laid plot between him and that woman; you cannot call it fishing *now*!"

"Pray, why not? She has taken a sea-line! Oh, Nita," more seriously, "how can you be so childish? As if you believed that Grevy cared a straw for anyone but yourself!"

"If he loved me, he would have come back at all costs," was her parrot cry.

"Meaning the cost of his life! Upon my word, you are talking like a spoilt child of five years of age. Come down to the beach and look at the sea, it is magnificent; the gale will blow these ideas out of your head."

"No, thank you; I detest walking in a high wind. In fact, I'd rather be quite alone for a little while. I want to think."

"Well, don't think any evil of Grevy. *Honi soit qui mal y pense.*"

"Fancy him alone on an island, cut off from all the world, with that detestable creature!"

"To hear you, one would suppose she was Circe at the very least. Well, I'm going."

And as she spoke, Maureen wrapped herself in a warm red cloak, and departed. She struggled down to the shore, where she stood with fluttering skirts, drinking in the strong salt air, and watching the great malachite-green waves as they charged from afar, and smote upon the shingle with a wild smother of spray and the booming as of minute guns. Ragged black clouds, torn by the wind, drifted wildly across the sky—assuming weird outlines—and the sun sank sullenly. When dusk began to fall, and fierce squalls chased one another from the mouth of the bay, she returned to the hotel to report to Nita that the wind was raging worse than ever. With this errand in her mind, she hurried down a corridor and flung open the door of their sitting-room with somewhat breezy violence. The apartment was in semi-darkness, candles had not yet been lighted, and the sole and subdued illumination came from the fire. Close to it, on the end of a couch, half in light and half in shade, sat Nita, holding a peacock screen between her delicate cheek and the blaze.

As Maureen's eyes became accustomed to the obscurity she distinguished yet another outline on the sofa, the figure of a man, who—who—yes—who had been holding her sister's hand.

Or could it be merely her own extravagant fancy? At any rate, her ears had not deceived her, for, as she burst into the room, she had overheard Nita say:

"I'll give him one day more. *Hus—sh.*"

Nita was weak—not wicked. But oh, how could she discuss Greville with this odious outsider, this hateful Mr. Lovell? The discovery was a revelation; her young, half-comprehending mind was all in a tumult; her heart throbbed quickly, and her fingers trembled as she came forward, hastily unfastening her cloak.

"So, here you are!" exclaimed Nita, with an alacrity that suggested a welcome interruption. "And how is the weather now?"

"Worse than ever," she answered. Maureen was not looking at Nita as she spoke—her eyes were fixed on her companion with unflinching scorn.

"I've been sitting here in the dark," announced Lady Fanshawe, "nursing an awful headache, until Mr. Lovell took compassion on me, and brought me his cure; it has acted like a charm."

"Why don't you have lights? Where are the matches and candles?" asked her sister, sharply.

"Pray allow me," volunteered Lovell, beginning to grope on a table near him. "And so you were not blown away, Miss D'Arcy? You were not afraid of being wafted out to sea?"

"No, I am not so easily wafted anywhere."

"And," continued Lady Fanshawe, "surely you know by this time that Maureen is not afraid of anything on land or sea except young men?"

"How can you be so ridiculous?"—And suddenly lighting a candle, she gazed at her sister. Yes, Nita looked confused—guiltily confused; her cheeks were flushed, and she had been crying recently.

Maureen turned an interrogative gaze on Nita's visitor as she said—

"Mr. Lovell knows perfectly well that you are joking. For instance, I am not the least afraid of *him*."

"No, indeed; the boot is on the other foot. I'm desperately afraid of Miss D'Arcy. When she frowns, I tremble like a leaf;" and he laughed disagreeably.

"A green bay leaf, I conclude.—I am glad to

hear it," she answered coldly. "If you incur my displeasure, you will know what to expect."

Mr. Lovell considered her lazily. She certainly made a beautiful picture standing there, with a bright colour in her cheeks, a scarlet cloak over her shoulders, a candle in her hand. The whole soul of the girl seemed concentrated in her eyes—lovely long-lashed eyes—but in those lovely long-lashed eyes he, Bertram Lovell, read a stern challenge and a distinct threat. The discovery tickled him immensely, but he managed to keep his amusement out of his countenance.

The temerity of a girl of her age venturing to pit herself against him!

"When you are a little older, Miss D'Arcy," and he smiled indulgently, "you will find that there is only one thing to be reckoned on in this life, and that is—the unexpected."

"There is the dressing-bell," interposed Lady Fanshawe; "that at least is never unexpected."

She felt sorely embarrassed by the tone of the conversation. This crossing of swords between her sister and her friend made her nervous. She was aware that they hated each other cordially, but hitherto they had observed a decent, if armed, neutrality. Now there was

a rasping note in Bertie's voice, and Maureen's eyes were flaming. She looked as if she were on the point of making one of her deadliest blunders. This dressing-bell proved a thrice blessed diversion, a truly welcome truce.

Lady Fanshawe rose at once, saying, "Well, I'm going off to adorn," and moved gracefully towards the door. Lovell sprang to open it, and as he did so bent forward and murmured, in his low, caressing tone—

"You will *remember!*"

Maureen, who was close behind, caught the last word. She paused.

"That was what King Charles said when he was about to lose his head. I hope," looking at Lovell steadily, "that you do not think my sister is in danger of losing hers?" and with this thrust Miss D'Arcy passed out without waiting for any rejoinder, but indeed Lovell was too much surprised to answer, or even bow. As he stood and watched her walking away down the corridor, he exclaimed under his breath, "Young devil!"

Then, as he lounged off towards the billiard-room, he asked himself anxiously, "Now, I wonder how much she guesses?"

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It was noted that evening how Lady

Fanshawe had entirely recovered her spirits. Her eyes sparkled with vivacity, her colour was brilliant; never had she looked so charming or so gay. She joined the merry games in the drawing-room, and threw herself into these with amazing enthusiasm; she talked the most reckless nonsense; her laugh was almost hysterical, her animation feverish. In the sage opinion of Mr. Foulcher—who was merely a looker-on—Lady Fanshawe's strange manner concealed some vague purpose or a hidden fear. She was either on the brink of an illness, an adventure, or a discovery; such, for instance, as her sister's secret. He stared at Maureen with cool, pitiless scrutiny. How could a girl with such a haughty mouth condescend to a low intrigue?

Once in her own room, a strange reaction set in. Nita became silent, absent-minded, and during the whole period of hair-brushing she never once opened her lips.

Then, suddenly, without the smallest warning, she broke into a tempest of passion. (It was as if she were raving to herself more than directing her conversation to her companion.) "*She*—who had always been so circumspect, and, though married to a man years older than herself, had never encouraged attentions!

She had never accepted presents, nor written sly notes, nor made secret appointments, like others she could name. No; no one could cast a stone at her! She had come to this abominable hole entirely to please Greville, and all the thanks she got was, that he spent the whole of his time with another woman. He, who pretended to be a sort of woman-hater! Oh, what hypocrites men were!" And Nita sprang to her feet, and began to walk about the room. "Oh, yes! *Now* she perfectly understood why he came so constantly to Ballybay, and never allowed anything to interfere with his plans. To fish! Ha, ha! No; it was simply a blind to throw dust in her eyes. —He came to meet that woman!"

"Oh, Nita, Nita!" expostulated Maureen, as her eyes followed the sweeping figure, "how can you say such things?"

"Yes, all Ballybay knew it except me," she raged. "I, of course, was the last to be informed. Informed? Why, I saw it with my own eyes! And, indeed, Bertie Lovell says all the world is talking of it! It is the scandal of the place, and everyone is so sorry for *me*!"

"Mr. Lovell is not telling the truth."

"That's so like you!" turning on her fiercely.

"Of course, you side with Grev; and that woman is quite a dear friend of yours—you are in their secret, their abominable secret."

"Nita, you have gone mad, stark staring mad!"

"No, I've come to my senses at last. If Bertie Lovell had been my husband *he* would never stay away from me; no, no matter what the weather—and for the sake of another woman. Oh, it's shameful!" she sobbed passionately, as she sank into a chair.

"Perfectly shameful!" echoed Maureen. "How can you say such things of Greville, who, you know in your heart, adores you! How can he help it if you hate fishing, and are too nervous to venture in a boat? As to Mr. Lovell daring any weather, I dare him to go out in *that*," and she sprang up and dashed open the window and let in the hungry roar of the sea. "He is a coward—a mere carpet knight—I detest him!"

"It's thoroughly mutual, I do assure you. He says it's disgraceful the way you bully me!"

"I? It is disgraceful of him to insinuate things against Grev, and to make—yes, I will say it—open love to you. I won't allow it!"

"Maureen," cried her sister, rising to her

feet, "leave the room this instant!" and she pointed to the door in a fine dramatic attitude.

"Oh, yes, I'll go, of course, but not until I've warned you against Mr. Lovell."

"Do you presume to warn *me*?" demanded Nita, in a shaking voice.

"Yes, I do. Do you know his motto, 'All is fair in love and war'? He is a dangerous companion for you, a most unscrupulous man; proud of his scalps—the scalps of pretty young married women."

"Maureen, how dare you, a young girl, say such abominable things?"

"Oh, I dare a good deal occasionally," she answered coolly. "I wish I could dare still more. Sometimes, when I've seen Mr. Lovell leaning over you, and whispering in his usual insidious style, I've felt inclined to *hit* him."

"That will do!" cried Nita convulsively. "Leave the room at once. Do you hear me? Go!"

"Very well, I'm going; but recollect that you will have to do your own hair to-morrow morning. Good night," and Miss D'Arcy marched out with all the honours of the last word.

The next day the weather had moderated a little, and so had Lady Fanshawe's temper.

She despatched a flag of truce to her sister, and held out the olive branch, in the shape of a tortoiseshell hair-brush.

"You made me so furious last night. Really, Moll, you *do* say the most frightful things."

"The naked truth is rarely beautiful; but, at any rate, I am sincere."

"Yes, sincerity is sometimes another name for spite."

"According to Mr. Lovell. How I hate his stale cynicisms!"

"Grev said I'd repent not going with him. I've repented it ten times a day, and he has been away three whole days. I wonder how he is managing for clothes."

"The coastguard. But he will be rather miserable without——"

"Without what?" sharply.

"His toothbrush."

"Toothbrush, indeed! I thought you were about to say without *me*, but you turn everything into a joke. Oh, why did I not go with him?"

"My dear Nita, you are far better where you are; if you had gone, you would have been utterly miserable. You know how nervous you are, even on the lakes."

"The sea is much calmer this morning,"

proclaimed Lady Fanshawe, going to the window and leaning out.

"Yes, not so bad in the bay; but it is sure to be rough outside. However, I really think they will be back by eleven o'clock."

But twelve o'clock came, and there was no sign of the absentees, and Lady Fanshawe now surrendered herself to the darkest anticipations. Among these loomed an American liner, which was carrying the culprits to New York—the Skelligs being conveniently in the track of the greyhounds of the Atlantic.

Maureen having found all arguments and blandishments a mere waste of time and breath—for her sister was as deaf as the traditional adder—set out for a long ramble with Taffy. When they returned it was after six o'clock, and Miss D'Arcy was handed a brick-coloured envelope, which had arrived an hour previously, addressed "Fanshawe or D'Arcy," but her ladyship had given strict directions that she was not to be disturbed. She opened the telegram, which was from a station on the bay, and said—

"Hope to be with you to-morrow by twelve; waiting for a boat.

"GREVILLE."

Maureen ran upstairs and turned the handle of her sister's door. She found that it was locked ; however, she easily effected an entrance through the dressing-room, and as she did so she uttered a faint exclamation, for the nest was empty.

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CHAPTER XXII

"MY KINGDOM FOR A HORSE!"

MAUREEN gazed round the apartment in blank amazement, a sensation which presently gave way to uneasiness, when she caught sight of a square envelope ostentatiously stuck in the looking-glass and addressed to herself. Inside she read, in her sister's dashing handwriting—

"DEAR OLD MOLL,

"I am going away with one who really appreciates me; it has been all settled since Thursday. I gave Grev two days' law. I am sorry to leave you to make excuses; you had better pretend I am ill (something infectious), and when Grev comes back *he* will explain. We travel by the evening coach to Shule, and go on by rail at two in the morning, so have a good start! Send my boxes to Aunt Rosa's. A line to the Continental in Paris will find—

"NITA."

No ; she was not hidden anywhere about the room. It was *not* a joke—Nita had taken her strong boots, her travelling cloak, her dressing-case. She had gone.

For two or three minutes Maureen stood appalled, then she sat down on the side of the bed ; she trembled so much that the paper actually rattled in her hand. Well, there was no use in sitting there shaking. She must be up and doing. First of all she tore the note into small pieces, then she locked the dressing-room door and put the key in her pocket, and told Julia (whom she met on the landing) that "Lady Fanshawe was on no account to be disturbed that night." Next she ran down and interviewed the proprietor with regard to a car, or a carriage, to take her to Shule at once.

"I'll pay anything," she added, rather wildly.

"No use, miss," he replied ; "you'd have it for nothing at all if it was here, and welcome ; but the Clonsast Mission has cleared us out of everything—but the bathing-machine."

She turned away with a hopeless gesture and went back to her room and stood gazing unconsciously at the reflection of her own white face, and thinking hard. Mrs. Duckitt was absent ; she dare not confide in anyone else, but

must rely on her own resources, for who could help her? Where could she get a horse? The *coachman*! Yes, not a moment to be lost. She put on her hat—it was now dusk—and ran over to Macgill's and knocked boldly. The door was opened by a neat old woman, who stared inhospitably and said:—

"What's your pleasure, miss?"

"I want to see Terence, the coachman, at once."

"Sure, he is only just in these few minutes, and dead beat. Can't ye call to-morrow?"

"All the same, I must see him," she answered imperiously. "And I cannot wait."

The old woman flung back the door on the right and gave a complete view of a low raftered room: a table with a blue and red checked cloth, a lamp, Terence sitting by the fire in an armchair, his dog in another. Over the chimneypiece hung a sword and a few framed photographs. There were well-bound books lying about; a frayed tiger-skin covered the sofa; it was a shabby apartment, and the atmosphere was thick with smoke, but it was the den of a gentleman.

"A young lady who says she *must* see you," announced Mrs. Macgill, in a tone of emphatic disapproval, "and she won't wait."

He turned his head slowly, then put down his pipe, and sprang up.

"I see something has happened!" he exclaimed.

Miss D'Arcy nodded in reply, and he noticed that her face was pale, and had a set look.

"I can't ask you to sit here; but I'll come out with you at once," and, seizing his cap, he hurried into the little street.

"Well, now, what is it?" he asked, in a low voice.

For a moment she choked, and could not find words. At last she said, "I have lost my sister."

"Lost your sister!" in a tone of sharp surprise.

"Mr. Terence, I know you are a gentleman, and I am going to put our family honour and good name into your hands. My sister has gone away with Mr. Lovell. I must follow her and bring her back; but how? There is not a horse in the place. Can you help me?"

"Of course I can. When did she start?"

"By the six o'clock coach. I remember passing it, and noticing a lady with a thick black veil who was beside Mr. Lovell. I was so thankful he had gone; I never dreamt that he had taken Nita with him."

"Any particulars—a note?" he questioned briefly.

"Yes. Just now I found one in her room when I went in to give her a wire. She has been—and is still supposed to be—lying down; I've locked the door. She will be at Shule at eleven—the mail leaves at two and crosses to England to-morrow by the seven o'clock boat."

"We must catch her at Shule. You can ride well, I know. Kirwan has a good brown mare he would lend me; she's not broken to side-saddle, but——"

"But I've ridden unbroken colts."

"There is a shorter cut over the Slieve-na-Goil mountain; it is every inch of thirty miles, a shocking road, a mere goat-path, but you have good nerves. I know the way, and we will get in before twelve o'clock, if we have any luck. There's no time to lose—it's seven now. Go back at once, and get ready; put on a warm jacket, have something to eat, and I'll meet you with the two horses at the far yard-gate."

"But a boy could show me the way," she protested. "One of the gillies; I'd pay him well. Why should you trouble?"

Terence made no answer whatever, but started towards the stables and walked rapidly away. Obviously, there was nothing for Maureen to do but return to the hotel. Since

she had talked to Terence, she felt less shattered and hopeless; in such a critical moment he seemed almost irritatingly cool, but, at any rate, the crisp decision of his manner had inspired her with confidence.

At a quarter past seven she stole downstairs unseen, reached the back door, and finally the yard, where Julia, gossiping with two stablemen, beheld a man—a gentleman—come riding in, followed by a groom leading a saddle-horse. Then Miss D'Arcy walked quickly forward, the gentleman dismounted, swung her into the side-saddle, settled her stirrup and reins, and without a word the pair passed through the gate into the open land behind the hotel, where in the dusk they disappeared at a gallop.

Julia, Patsey, and Bob gazed into one another's faces in interrogative silence, then Julia exclaimed:—

"Well, I'll never believe me own eyes again! Here's a nice business! Terence, the coachman, just looking as grand as any lord, has come wid a horse, and run away wid Miss D'Arcy. *Now* I know why she asked for the leg of chicken and a bit of bread; and her poor sister half dead wid a headache, and Sir Greville away. Oh, what's to be done at all, at all?" and she wrung her hands in despair.

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"Nothing but hould your prate," replied a man who had come down with the second horse. "As for never believing yer eyes again, there's more in *this* than meets the eye. Miss D'Arcy has terribly pressing business—life and death—and she bid to go off, and *he* has gone to show her the way."

"'Tis a quare time of night to have business, and to face for the Sliev Mountain on Kirwan's little blood mare, wid a handsome young man for company!"

"There's no harm in it, ye divil. Julia, I thought *you* were a good-hearted girl. If anywan asks after Miss D'Arcy, 'tis in her own room she is, snug in bed this night—and mind ye hold a hard cheek to it."

CHAPTER XXIII

OVER SLIEV NA GOIL

TIMIDLY guided by the pale stars, the riders made the most of the springy pasture land, Kirwan's brown three-year-old storming along in a condition of excitement bordering upon frenzy. The flapping cloth, the light, unaccustomed burden, unusual hour, unusual haste, stirred her hot young blood, and she galloped with an abandon that would have disconcerted many. They skirted the lake, turned into a narrow breen, holding on at the same racing pace, then as the hill slopes were approached, gradually subsided to a canter—a trot—a walk.

"What made her do it?" enquired Terence, suddenly, as side by side he and his companion breasted a steep ascent.

"Jealousy! pique!" responded Miss D'Arcy. "She often does things on the spur of the moment, and repents immediately."

"Do you think she will have repented by twelve o'clock?"

"I am certain of it."

"Sir Greville is a real good sort, the other is a crooked kind of chap. There is no comparison between them." Then, after a pause, he added, in a tone of conviction, "There must be something behind it all."

"There is somebody—Mrs. Duckitt."

"Mrs. Duckitt?"

"Yes; you know how she and my brother-in-law always fish together—they are both fanatics. Well, my sister cannot believe in people fishing for pure pleasure. She——"

"Oh, I say, come! You are not going to tell me that Lady Fanshawe is jealous of Mrs. Duckitt?—Mrs. Duckitt, who is as weather-beaten as a boatman, and has the complexion of a brown boot! And your sister one of the prettiest women I've ever seen!"

"All the same, it is true. For a long time my sister has been furiously angry, and no one has known anything about it but me. Her jealousy has smouldered for weeks; now it has burst out."

"And taken a most extraordinary course."

"I think I must explain a little. Greville has always been devoted to my sister—entirely

at her beck and call—at home. To see him, as she imagines, absorbed in another woman, and spending hours in her company, has driven her crazy. I tell her that it's all flies or politics—Nita hates both—that it's nothing more than a bye-election, or a blue phantom, but she won't believe me."

"Oh, won't she?" rather drily.

"No. And now, by bad luck, Greville and Mrs. Duckitt were left behind on the Skelligs, and have been weather-bound for three days. My sister is simply beside herself. My brain feels numb from inventing excuses. Another woman would laugh, and treat it as a joke, but each day she has become more and more frantic, Mr. Lovell more and more specious and sympathetic. I spoke to her about him last night, and said that I would not allow it."

"*You* wouldn't allow it!" and he burst into a short laugh. "And what did your chaperon and sister say?"

"She ordered me out of the room. However, we made friends again this morning, and I thought it was all right. The weather abating—Mr. Lovell going away—I felt quite in good spirits!"

"Of course—the calm before the storm."

"I was out till rather late this afternoon,

and when I returned I found a telegram from Greville to say that he would arrive to-morrow at twelve o'clock."

"I see; and you naturally wish Sir Greville to find 'all present and correct.' Well, if it is in the power of mortal man, you shall take her back with you. Is she your only sister?"

"Yes, my only near relation."

"And you don't want to lose her?"

"No—of course not." A pause, and then she continued: "Somehow, when you talk, I feel quite sanguine and confident, as if it had all blown over."

"I think we shall bring it off, though we are not really out of the wood yet. If Sir Greville hears of this—well, call it *drive*—there will be trouble, or is he not easily jealous?"

"I'm sure I do not know. I've never seen him jealous, and I cannot enter into his feelings."

"By Jove! but *I* can. If my wife ran away with a fellow for even a dozen yards, I'd never see her again."

"Then, you and Nita would exactly match."

"I think not," with unexpected emphasis.

"I only mean, you are both so absurdly jealous. It is really too bad of me to take you this long journey," continued Miss D'Arcy. "After your

hard day's work, I don't know how I can thank you."

"Please don't thank me for what I feel to be a distinguished honour. Here is a good bit of ground, and we can push on and make the most of it; I've tied my handkerchief round my arm, you see, and I'll pilot you all right."

They were presently climbing narrow paths along the slopes of Sliev na Gail; now among rocks and boulders, again by the edge of a sheer precipice between the heather and the sea. For half an hour they proceeded in single file, and in absolute silence; above them towered the mountains, far below lay a great estuary, and occasionally the cool night-air brought a salt whiff from the Atlantic. As the moon rose with majestic leisure Maureen looked back, and then exclaimed:

"What is this white thing coming after us? Your dog, I do believe!"

"By George, and so it is! He is used to following me on horseback, though the coach is barred; he has sneaked out and run us down. It's a long way for him," pausing; then he called imperatively, "Go home, Lost! Go home! Do you hear me, sir?"

Lost heard, but heeded not; he simply

flattened himself out, and crawled along, like a disobedient worm.

"It's no use, I know. He considers he is within his rights; he has come ten miles."

"And we have only twenty more! How quickly we have got over the ground! How did you manage about the horses?"

"Well, the one you are riding I simply annexed; I dare say his owner will think the fairies have borrowed him. Mine is one of the young ones belonging to the coach."

"And who will drive the coach to-morrow?"

"Michael O'Sullivan; he is my under-study. I am my own boss, you see; the Company leave this road to me, and I am given a free hand, and work as if for myself."

"And when winter comes, do you still remain here?"

"No, I go away; I cannot say I go home—I have no home to go to."

"Not to—to—your—er—relation?"

"My grandmother? No. She belongs too much to the good old school, or dynasty, to suit me; we do not stable our horses together."

"Your"—very slowly—"grandmother, did you say?"

"Yes; it sounds farcical, I admit, yet it is just so. My only other relation is my sister,

Constance, who is married to an Austrian officer, now quartered in Vienna. My grandmother lives in Dublin. I am twice in Vienna for once in Dublin."

"Then it is your grandmother who would have, as you expressed it, 'played the devil at Macgill's'?"

"Yes," with a laugh; "she and Mrs. Macgill would scarcely agree. Mind yourself here," he exclaimed suddenly, as he and his horse slithered down the bank of a stream. "Keep up after me—out of the boggy part."

"How well you know the good and bad places!—you pick your way like——"

"A battery mule!" he suggested. "I've come this journey once or twice, and, besides that, I've been up in the Himalayas on shooting trips—the paths and precipices there are what you may call jumpy, sometimes only a couple of inches between you and kingdom-come."

"But surely you never went shooting trips at night?"

"No, but I've ridden thirty miles before daybreak, and hustled along as hard as I dared to get back in time for duty—from a ball."

"Then, you were a society man?"

"More like a society boy, for I was barely twenty. Are you a society young lady?"

"No, I am not a social success—I was too long on a run before I was sent to be tamed at a strict school in Germany. I am an unfortunate combination of a bold, plain speaker and a prim bread-and-butter miss."

"Oh, I should hardly call you a bread-and-butter miss."

"And besides, I have not the art of saying nothing brilliantly. Now, Nita has it to perfection; I've sometimes caught her holding her breath when I flounder into a conversational quicksand."

"At any rate, you don't flounder into any other sort of quicksand," he remarked with significance. "Take care, or we shall both be in a real morass; these innocent-looking patches are generally deadly."

The moon, now fully risen, illuminated the misty peaks above them, whilst far below lay a scene of grandeur and beauty. A timid little wind arose, and swept softly down the bare shoulders of Sliev na Goil, and then fell away in low whisperings among the purple heather. Occasionally the riders came upon a sleepy sheep, or roused a whirring grouse, or a weird white hare. The path gradually developed greater difficulties, the precipices became steeper—it was wonderful how the young

horses had sobered down, and how they picked their way so boldly, and yet so carefully, along this unaccustomed track ; once or twice the hill torrents, boiling between boulders, had almost swept them off their legs.

Suddenly, as they turned a corner, they appeared to enter upon a totally different region. The dark ravines looked full of mystery and of infinite depth ; the whole surroundings remote and lonely, whilst a hasty and turbulent stream thundered along its rocky bed as it rushed through the glen.

"It is a desolate, savage kind of scenery, is it not?" remarked Terence. "No wonder this is called 'the mountain the wild people.'"

"It is wild enough, certainly ; but where are the people?"

"Dead and gone centuries ago ; I believe we are coming to the worst part of our journey now," he continued, as they approached the river. "There used to be a bridge hereabouts, bad enough, but better than nothing."

He paused, and looked up and down.

"Gone ! I was afraid those heavy floods would carry it away."

The mountain stream had swollen to important dimensions—it was an angry, impetuous

torrent: with ragged, rotten banks, deep pools, sharp rocks, and a strong current. It roared lustily as it ran through the valley and precipitated itself over a fall of sixty feet.

"Impassable!" ejaculated Maureen. Had she ridden so far all in vain—was her road to be barred by this brawling, bridgeless river? She took in all the details with an experienced eye, and repeated aloud the word, "Impassable!"

"Impassable or impossible—we are going to get across somehow!" rejoined Terence, who had been gravely surveying the situation.

As he spoke he dismounted and came towards her, leading his horse.

"It is out of the question to ford it in the saddle—the banks are too steep. We can get over here, at the narrow place, and I'll swim the horses higher up."

Meanwhile he tethered his animal to a stump of a mountain ash.

"I dare not do it!" stammered Maureen, and her face blanched as she looked down on the rushing black water, with white blocks of foam whirling on its surface. "I'd never cross! I'd—fall in!—I've no head!"

"Nonsense! Come along," he answered, holding out his arm to assist her. "You are

not going to lose your head for this occasion only! Here," standing on the edge of the torrent, "is our best place. You must trust yourself to me." And as he spoke he sprang down on the first rock. Maureen followed trembling, guided by his steady hand, and looked at the rushing water.

"No, it's no use. I—I—dare not," she faltered, drawing back.

In another moment she stood on the dew-soaked moss, catching her breath in quick little gasps. He had lifted her bodily up in his arms, plunged into the torrent, carried her across, and set her high and dry on the bank, as if it were the most matter-of-course performance. It was all done so promptly and so easily, that she was too astounded to speak. He, without a word, returned for the horses. Kirwan's brown filly proved tractable, if a little surprised to find herself swimming a few strokes for the first time in her existence, but her companion of the coach was stubborn—he planted his fore feet, he fought, and reared, and even went so far as to scream! Fifteen precious minutes were wasted by this struggle between man and beast, and during that time Maureen learnt what was meant when people declared that "Terence was a born ruler of horses:" he

was so amazingly patient, yet so firm. At last he forced the trembling coward (whose feelings Maureen fully shared) into the water, and then helped him to find his legs, and assisted him up the bank with a manner that was almost affectionate. Finally he went back and brought over the dog.

"I am sorry to have lost so much time," said Terence, advancing to Maureen at last, "but of course I could not proceed on foot. You see, you may 'bring a horse to the water,' but you cannot make him *swim*! Allow me to put you up. We are over all the bad part now, the rest is plain sailing—or riding." Here, as he placed the reins in her hands, he added, in a different tone, "I hope you will forgive me for taking you across without so much as by your leave? It was no time for ceremony, and when every moment is of vital importance, etiquette is all rubbish, don't you think?"

"Yes; only for you, I should be still shivering on the brink," she answered, as she gave her habit a little kick; "I never could have faced it."

But as Terence walked over to where his own horse stood, he was painfully aware that etiquette was *not* all rubbish. His heart was throbbing, his head was swimming, and in his

arms he still was holding a frightened girl whose sweet breath fanned his cheek.

* * * * *

The couple resumed their journey without further delay, riding through the moonlit glens in single file, whilst Lost, exhausted but devoted, lagged far behind.

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CHAPTER XXIV

LATE VISITORS

As Maureen urged her horse over the wild mountain passes, the cool, sharp air stimulated her nerves. She was conscious of a delicious sense of escape from all that was habitual and commonplace. Now and then this sensation almost overwhelmed her anxiety and suspense.

"How far have we to go?" she enquired, at the end of a long, steep ascent.

"Ten miles," answered her guide. "We are coming to a cabin; it is in the next glen; and I happen to know the people who live there—a weaver and his wife—very decent folk. I'll ask them to give me a little meal-and-water for the horses, and let you rest for half an hour."

"But I don't want to rest. I want to get on."

"But you must rest. Excuse me for seeming

so discourteous. We have made capital progress; it is not more than ten o'clock; we can afford half an hour. The horses want it, for one thing, and so do you. You will require all your strength to get through this forced march, and to argue with your sister at the end of it. If you arrived worn-out and speechless, what good would that do?"

"And if I arrived too late!—how would that be?"

"That would be still worse. But since we have got on so well up to now, and are over all difficulties, I think I may safely promise that you will arrive in time. There is the cabin; do you see the light in the window?"

In another five minutes they were in front of this little cottage, situated in a truly desolate glen, and Terence leant down and rapped loudly on the door with the handle of his whip. There was a long pause; two voices were audible within, and at last a man called out, unsteadily—

"Who's there, in the name of God?"

"Terence, the coachman, and very sorry to disturb you."

"Ah, then sure you're kindly welcome at any hour," came the reply, as the door was unfastened, and a man appeared in a shirt and

trousers, holding a long dip-candle in his hand, which illuminated a long, thin face.

"And you're not alone?" glancing suspiciously at the other horse.

"No," replied Terence, "I've a lady with me."

"Begor! and so ye have!"

"We are in a desperate hurry into Shule—almost life and death—so we've come across Sliev Mountain."

"The Lord bless us! Not the lady? I know *you'd* go anywhere."

"I want a little meal-and-water, for the horses are rather done. It's more goats' work than theirs. Miss D'Arcy will rest," and he gave her his hand to dismount, and she entered the low cabin.

"The fire is nearly out," said Pat, "but I'll have it lit in a brace of shakes," and he began blowing on a sod. "Mary, come out here, and look after the company!" calling to his wife, who was within the room.

In answer to the summons a black-haired woman, in rather sketchy costume, hurried forth, carrying a child in her arms.

"Oh, Mr. Terence, but yer welcome kindly; an' this," looking at Maureen, "is your young lady. God bless her, and good luck to her. Ye got a lovely girl when ye went about it."

"You are mistaken, Mary O'Hara," he said, advancing into the kitchen, and speaking with a touch of hauteur utterly foreign to Terence the coachman. "This lady and I are mere strangers. She is staying in Ballybay, and is most anxious to meet her sister in Skule to-night on a matter of urgent importance. There was no car or carriage to be had; I have brought her over by the bridle-path, as there is not an hour to lose."

"By the bridle-path? Glory! Weil, I humbly beg your honour's pardon," said Mary. "Excuse me for making so free."

"If you will allow Miss D'Arcy to sit by the fire, it is all we will ask; and I am very sorry to disturb you in this way."

"Oh, don't spake of it, Mr. Terence. Sure we are glad to see ye, day or night. I'm terribly put about with this child cutting her teeth, and hardly got a wink these three nights. I'm just fair wore out, but she's nearly off now."

"Then, please go back to bed and sleep," urged Maureen eagerly. "If you won't, I shall go and sit outside the door; but I shall be grateful if I may stay at the fire, provided you don't make a stranger of me."

"Well, then, miss dear, I won't," rejoined

Mary emphatically; "I can hardly keep me eyes open. If you will sit there in the wee chair, the fire will burn up; and there's a sup of milk in the blue jug, and a few cold praties in the yellow crock. I'm sorry we can't offer ye better tratement, and that I am—but there isn't a pinch of tay in the house."

"Good-night," said Maureen. "Do please go to bed—I shall manage splendidly."

When Mrs. O'Hara had withdrawn, Maureen drank off the milk, and left a sovereign in the empty jug (she was well provided with money). Then she peeled and ate a cold potato, and finally sat down at the fire, glad enough of a rest; in fact, she was just on the point of dropping to sleep when Terence came in and closed the door softly. He took off his cap, and found a seat at the opposite side of the hearth, with Lost stretched at his feet. A curious thought flashed into Maureen's brain. How odd it seemed!—they two, as if alone in this quiet mountain glen—a stranger looking in at the window might imagine that it was their home! Presently, Mary O'Hara from her room within began to sing a low, sweet melody. The air was sad, and in the minor key. Mary had an exquisite voice; as fresh as a bird's, yet soft, sympathetic, and of almost

piercing pathos. It was an old Irish lullaby, and Mary sang it in her mother tongue. The refrain at the end of each verse came in a delicious crooning murmur:—

“Seo h-ín seo, h-uil leo leo
Seo h-ín seo, as tu mo leanbh.”

Do chuirfinn fein mo leanbh a chodladh
'Sni mar do chuirfeadh mna na m-bodach,
An súisín buidhe ní m-braitlín borraig
Acht a g-cliabhán óir is an ghaoth dhá bhogadh
Seo h-ín seo, h-uil leo leo
Seo h-ín seo, as tu mo leanbh.

Codail, a leanbh, gur ba chodladh slán duit,
Is as do chodladh go d-tugar do shláinte,
Nar buailidh tréighid ná greim an báis duit,
Galar na leanbh ná 'n bholgach gránna
Seo h-ín seo, h-uil leo leo
Seo h-ín seo, as tu mo leanbh.

Maureen listened breathlessly. In all her wide experience of songs and singers, she had never heard any air that touched her like this lullaby sung by a poor Irish peasant, in the heart of the mountain of the wild people.

“What is it about?” she whispered to her *vis-à-vis* as the last word died away.

“About a child, and a gold cradle, and murmuring boughs, green trees, and good wishes,” he replied in a low voice.

“Then, you understand Irish?”

"I had an Irish nurse," he answered briefly.

Terence was not inclined for conversation. Probably he was tired, or hungry? Should she offer him the best the house afforded—a cold potato? No. And there they two sat in dead silence—a silence laden with thought.

Maureen was sensible that her companion was not merely no common man, but no common character. He had evidently, for reasons best known to himself, extinguished his identity. He was a brave gentleman, and one of masterful individuality. She felt his influence thrill her as he sat there half in shadow, motionless, as if carved in stone.

He was a man whom one could rely on; he had a stout heart, a strong arm, a clear head. He only spoke the truth when he said, "You may trust me." The fire had now dwindled down, after the provoking manner of turf; a sod fell in suddenly, and illuminated the little hearth, herself, the tired dog, and the dog's master. His eyes were on her as she glanced over at him, and in a second she had surprised their secret—the owner of those eyes loved her!

In another instant all was dim again, and as the blaze fell the blood mounted to her face; her heart beat fast with a strange new feeling.

Was it possible that such a discovery should move her so deeply? Had this poor turf-sod lighted her to happiness? Her violent agitation was suddenly stilled by a low, steady whisper.

"Time is up," it said, "and I hear Pat bringing round the horses. Let us get away quietly without disturbing Mary."

There was a creaking of leather, a jingling of bits, the door was pushed open, and Pat and his charges stood revealed—then, like a pair of thieves, the travellers stole forth into the open air, received from their host a fervent "God speed you!" and were presently beyond the range of his meditative gaze.

The remainder of the journey proved to be comparatively easy, and chiefly downhill. The sky was brilliant with stars, and the mountains were lovely with the mystery of the night. Terence rode first, carrying his dog in front of him, to the great annoyance of the coach-horse; Maureen followed unencumbered; the cool silence had a sobering effect on her mind. She lost no time in arguing herself out of her preposterous ideas. She was becoming like Letty De Vernac—a school-fellow—who believed that every man she saw adored her. Terence had handsome and expressive eyes—real Irish eyes—and that was all.

At last the pair struck into a lane ; it met them like a long-lost friend ; and from that point they were enabled to proceed rapidly, and clattered at a sharp trot through the sleepy streets of Shule. At precisely twenty minutes to twelve they dismounted at the railway hotel and entered, to the indignant bewilderment of the sleepy staff. People on coaches and cars were all very well and reasonable, but a handsome couple on horseback at twelve o'clock at night ! There was something not right about them ; *that* was going to the fair altogether !

"Is there a lady of the name of Fanshawe staying here ?" asked Terence of the staring waiter. "She came by the six o'clock coach."

"A red-haired lady wid a blue cloak, and a gentleman ?"

"Yes, that may be her."

"Faix, if you want her, ye will have to wait."

"This lady, her sister, wishes to go to her at once."

"An' how am I to know she's her sister ?"

"Because I tell you so !" rejoined the gentleman sternly.

"Oh !"—a little cowed—"then I suppose I'll have to go up. She's in number thirteen, taking a cup of tay."

"But if he is there," whispered Maureen, as they followed the waiter, "I—I—I—I could not see him."

"You'll be all right," rejoined Terence encouragingly. "You can talk to your sister, and leave him to *me*."

"Is Lady Fanshawe alone?" he enquired.

"Yes, sir, at present." As he spoke the waiter knocked, and in answer to a faint "Come in," he threw back the door, and said—

"There she is for yer!"

There, indeed, was Nita, seated before a teapot and plate of bread and butter, looking miserable, dishevelled, and forlorn. Who would call her lovely now? The instant she caught sight of Maureen, she rose with a little scream, and cried—

"Oh, Moll, my good angel! How *did* you find me?"

CHAPTER XXV

FOR LOVE OR MONEY

"How did you get here? You must have flown!" gasped Nita, throwing her arms round Maureen's neck and hugging her violently. And what a contrast they presented! One red-eyed and pale, her hair untidy, her beauty eclipsed, clinging, as if for life, to her younger sister; pale, too, but composed and self-restrained. "Moll, what inspired you to come?"

"I've come to take you back with me, dear—or else remain with you. At any rate, I am determined not to leave you."

"Miss D'Arcy, I will wait outside," announced a low voice from the background; "if you or Lady Fanshawe require me, I am at your service."

"The coachman!" cried Nita. "How preposterous!"

"Yes, and only for him I should never have

reached you ; there was no conveyance ; we rode over the mountains, and here I am," then she sat down and took her sister's hand firmly in hers. " Nita, you will return with me at once ? "

" My dear, I only wish I could, but I've—burnt my ships to the water's edge ; and now that I sit here alone I can't think *what* possessed me. The demon of not letting well alone, and jealousy."

" Tell me all about it."

" Why, you know how angry I've been with Grev ; and every day I grew more and more furious. I bottled up my wrath, which made it worse, and when three days elapsed, and not a sign of my husband and that woman, and when people smiled and made little jokes, I felt inclined to shriek. The whole affair got on my nerves. I seemed to fancy things, and that lookers-on were laughing at me in their sleeves, and that they knew my husband and Mrs. Duckitt had planned it, and they all pitied me ;" here she paused to gulp down her emotion. " Then Lovell——" and again words failed her.

" Oh, of course, *he* pitied you."

" Yes, he used to write me sweet little notes—darling notes—to comfort me, he said. Then

he came and sat with me, and talked to me so eloquently for hours, and said such clever things, and put Grev in such a light, that all my brain seemed topsy-turvy and perfectly giddy. He declared that other people appreciated me, and that my love and loyalty were wasted. By the fourth day I was wound up to do anything, and when one o'clock came and no boat, and I met Mrs. Rawley smiling in the hall and saying, 'What! not arrived yet? *Naughty* husband!' I was simply desperate, and by bad luck Bertie dropped in, and talked me into madness. We were to go off by the six o'clock coach. I was to pretend that I was lying down, to pack my bag and give it to him, to wear a thick Shetland veil, and get on the coach at another hotel. We managed it all beautifully; it was *so* easy. As for plans, we were to go straight to Paris, and then on to Italy. Grev would get a divorce, and in six months' time we would be married, and happy for ever afterwards."

"Yes? Never happy ever afterwards, you mean."

"And Bertie pointed out several similar cases, and how the women had been received, and how life was short, and youth and beauty fleeting, and I was wasting my best days on a man who no longer cared for me."

"Oh, Nita! you did not believe that?"

"Then I began to think how I would turn the tables on Grev when he came back; his feelings when he discovered that I had followed his example, and gone one better; his expression—his horror—his humiliation. This really was what urged me to take such a step, for I never cared two straws for Bertie Lovell; it was the alluring idea of retaliation that ran away with me."

"And for an idea you would ruin your life?"

"I've always been ready to cut off my nose to spite my face; you know that, surely, by this time. Well, then, we got away, and even before I was past the bridge I began to repent. It seemed, to my guilty conscience, that people recognised me, and held themselves aloof, and Lovell's love-making was simply saccharine, and sickened me, and I became very cross and snappy, and by the time we arrived here we had both completely lost our tempers. He is now in one room, I in another. I asked him to give me two hours to myself—I wanted to reflect."

"Yes; to look before you leap."

"And I've been thinking—and utterly miserable. It's all the fault of that woman, and those horrid Skelligs. If I go forward it's

ruin, of course ; I know that much of Grev—that he will never see me again ; and I believe most of my own set will cut me. If I go back——”

“ Yes, there is no if—you *are* coming back.”

“ If I go back, I am also ruined ; for I wrote a wild, crazy letter, and left it in a conspicuous place on the mantleshef, where Grev must find it. If he reads it, he will——” The rest was wild gesticulations and tears.

“ Then we should hurry away at once ; get there before him, destroy the letter, and no one will be the wiser. It is all a matter of time. I got a telegram to say that they arrive to-morrow at twelve o'clock. We shall easily be first in that race.”

“ And what a race ! A race for my happiness—and reputation.”

“ We shall win it, you will see. We must start to-morrow at six o'clock, and we shall be at Ballybay at eleven.”

“ But there is no coach from here till two.”

“ Post-horses ! ”

“ Yes—if we can get them. Call in your all-powerful coachman.”

Maureen went to the door, and beckoned Terence, who followed her gravely into the room.

"Of course, you have heard all about it?" began Lady Fanshawe. The coachman bowed profoundly. Was there any hidden sarcasm in that graceful salute? Well, she had no time to consider, but resumed: "There is no use making a mystery to you. You have brought my sister here just in time to save me from taking a fatal step. Now she wants me to return, and it will be again a race against time. I was certainly mad this afternoon—but there is no good in going into *that*; I'd fifty times rather have my husband than any man that breathes, but he vexed me, and I wanted to make him feel. Now I see that it is I myself whom I have pilloried. I left a wild, most incriminating letter in a conspicuous place. If my husband reads it, I am *lost*. I won't go on with this man and share his life. I shall be cast out of Greville's life, and—I shall take my own life!"

She paused and faced him, panting and breathless, shaking with the fury of her emotions.

"Lady Fanshawe, do you know what you really want?" he said, in a quiet voice—"a little sleep. You are fatigued—your nerves are overwrought; lie down and rest for the next four or five hours, and leave all arrangements to Miss D'Arcy and me."

"Yes, about carriages and horses ; but what can you do with Mr. Lovell ? He is in the coffee-room waiting for me to start by the express, at two o'clock."

"I will take him any message you wish to be delivered."

"He will be furious ; he will say he has been fooled. He won't give me up without a scene." Here she put her hand to her throat, and gasped, and gasped. "At any rate, he won't give up some silly notes of mine. I only wrote them when I was beside myself with jealousy and rage. But"—and here her voice rose to a plaintive wail—" *he* has got them !"

"I will do my utmost to secure them. And about post-horses ? I have no influence here as Terence, the coachman, but I think that perhaps the name of Lady Fanshawe, and a good round sum, would work the oracle ? Horses and vehicles are, I know, scarce. The mission at Clonsast has absorbed every horse and car in the barony."

"Let us ring, and ask to interview the landlord."

"There is no landlord—only Mrs. O'Hara. Meanwhile, I'll go down to the stables and see if I can unearth any sort of conveyance."

"The coachman is a gentleman, Maureen,

and a remarkably cool person—so cool that one would suppose we were discussing an afternoon drive, instead of what to me means life or death. I should not wonder if he is an old hand—and has run away with someone himself.”

“Nita! How can you say such horrid things, and of a man who is doing so much to serve you?”

“I don’t know. It’s my nature to think of these horrid things; and there is a love-tragedy in his face—it is the face of a hero, and, certainly, for this night’s adventure he deserves a D.S.O.”

Maureen was in no mood for such trifling; she lacked the culprit’s irrepressible buoyancy, and, rising abruptly, went over to the window, pulled back the blind, and stared out upon the quiet street, the quiet stars. At this fateful crisis in Nita’s life she was aware that it was her hand that guided the helm; she must brace herself and neither falter nor flinch. But she felt restless—impatient, and irritably eager to be doing, instead of *waiting*—to get to the end of the situation, and know the best, or worst.

Maureen’s head ached and throbbed as she leant her hot brow against the cool pane; her mind was in a fever, harassed by anxiety and deep misgivings, when she considered

Greville—and delay. But uppermost of all her mental worries was one little vagrant thought, which baited her with the persistence of a mosquito.

“‘A love-tragedy in his face.’ And, if there were, it was no concern of hers,” she argued, figuratively beating off the insect. But it returned again and yet again, and implanted its poisonous sting. “Was it likely that a man of his class would bury himself merely for the sake of pride, or to keep up family traditions, and support a pampered grandmother?” She broke into an odd, low laugh. “*No*. Of course it was a love-affair gone wrong.”

“It is not possible that you see anything entertaining in the street at *this* hour?” said Nita. “What *are* you laughing at, you odd creature?”

“Only at my thoughts,” she answered, without moving.

A suspicion that she dared not put into words forced itself upon her—a dreadful misgiving caught her tightly by the throat, and babbled of larger horizons, of the opening of an unknown paradise, of—— She turned sharply towards the light; her face was white, her eyes glittered coldly, and her lips were pressed together in implacable resolve.

"Why, you look as if you had seen a ghost—or a banshee!" exclaimed Nita. "What was it?"

"Only a mirage—a vision of folly. Come, I'm going to have a cup of tea," now taking up the tea-pot; "I am so thirsty."

"And hungry, too, I should imagine. Where did you dine?—or, *did* you dine?"

"Oh yes, and in two places. I had the drumstick of a chicken in Ballybay, and a cold potato on the top of Sliev na Goil."

"*Rather* a long interval between the meat and vegetables. I'm glad you are not ravenous, for, you see, I've eaten all the bread and butter, and I suppose it is too late to ask for more—but I dare say the coachman would get it. I wish he would come back."

After a delay of about ten minutes, Terence reappeared, to announce that he could not hear of anything—nothing sooner than the coach, at two o'clock in the afternoon.

"And that is *hours* too late," objected Nita. "Oh!—the landlady!" as a bulky, elderly woman in black, with black eyes, and a sort of black velvet coronet on her head, waddled in—not looking too well pleased.

"I'm told that you wish to see me, Lady Fanshawe; and though we have to keep open

house till two o'clock by reason of the mail—still and all, I'm not used to being called up at such an hour as this—half-past twelve; what do you want?"

"A carriage and pair of good horses to take us to Ballybay at six o'clock in the morning."

"A carriage and pair of good horses!" and she laughed with angry derision. "You might as well ask for the Crown of England, when ye were about it. If you were to put your eyes upon sticks you would not get a common jarvey—no, nor an asses' car. They are away at the mission."

"I'll give you any money you like to ask," urged Maureen; and she laid an appealing hand on Mrs. O'Hara's fat arm.

"No money could do it. It's not to be had for money—no, at no price. Ye must just wait for the coach."

Terence, who had been listening attentively, now came forward and said, "Oh, Mrs. O'Hara, it's of the greatest importance, and I'm sure you have a kind heart."

"What do *you* know about me heart, eh?" she demanded truculently. "Faith, I can answer for your *cheek*! And who are *you*, to argue? Terence, the coachman, I'm told," looking him up and down. "Well,

ye can't be always pushing the world before you; you've no jurisdiction *here*;" and she was about to pass him, when he put out his hand to detain her, and said, in a low, persuasive voice:—

"What cannot be done for money is sometimes done for love, Mrs. O'Hara."

"Well!"—drawing a long breath—"av all the impident young blaggards! And to a woman as old as his own mother."

"Or for the sake of old times," he continued immovably.

Mrs. O'Hara stared hard as he approached nearer to the light, and looked her straight in the face.

"You remember Shamil Castle?"

"Is it Shamil a Boo! An' wasn't I born there, man alive?"

"And so was I, Mrs. O'Hara."

"Balderskin! 'Tis like yer impidence to say so!"

"You knew the family?"

"Troth, and I did so. Mother of Heaven, them was raal gentry—not like the make-believes of to-day. I'd go through fire and water for one of *t im*."

"Then, lend me a carriage and a good pair of horses."

"God help us! Who are ye, at all, standing there and looking out av the old master's eyes?"

"I used to be little Sonny; since my father's death I am The Desmond."

"Oh, and sure an' I might have known ye!" throwing up her hands. "Me own little darling as I nursed! Oh, Sonny, Sonny, I thought ye wor dead!" and Mrs. O'Hara flung herself on him, cast her arms round his neck, and kissed him rapturously. "And to think of you growing into this fine, tall man! Faix, ye are nine-and-twenty—past. And where have ye been, agra achree? Tell me—where have ye been?" and she pushed him back and surveyed him eagerly.

"I was in India when my father died; you know we are stone broke; the property is in Chancery now, and I'm earning my living driving coaches."

"Faix, ye wor always a terror for horses; but to think of the Desmond, Chief of Munster, whose father had his own coach, his grandmother her outriders, just driving the mail like any common spalpeen! As for a carriage and horses, why, I'd walk all the way to Ballybay, and carry ye on me back, if I was able. Many a time I carried you in these two arms.

'Tis twenty years since I got married and come here—twenty years since I laid an eye on ye—and they said ye wor dead, and only Madame and Miss Constance left. And what's her terrible hurry and business?" nodding towards Lady Fanshawe. "Tell me, now."

"I cannot. You remember how you used to shake me for asking questions about O'Hara?"

"Aye! aye!" with a loud laugh; "that's true for you! But tell me this, agra, why ye never let on before, and me within forty mile? Many's the time I heard tell of Terence the coachman."

"Because I did not want any one to know who I was. I meant to tell you some day, Sally. I've seen you looking well and hearty, but you never recognised me. I depend on you to keep my secret."

"Faix, I'll keep anything to plase ye! Where's yer grandmamma? If she knew av yer coaching she would just lose her mind."

"She is in Dublin, in the old house; she believes I am in England. Well, now, Sally, I rely upon you to look after these ladies as if they were my own sisters, and to have a carriage ready at six to the minute. I'll see you again; I have to go down with a message to a gentleman."

"If it's the wan in the coffee-room, he is wearing out me fine new carpet like a caged beast. Wait, now——"

But Terence was gone.

"That's the Desmond for ye!" cried Mrs. O'Hara, triumphantly; "me own handsome boy. Sure, I thought they was all dead, but one young lady and Madame, the grandmother. Oh, they are a fine, royal old stock, as proud and imparious as ever ye see! What a Desmond commands he gets; and I thinking me own little fellow was buried out in India! Well, thank God, he's not, and I can put him back in me prayers!" and she wiped her eyes on her apron. "Now, ladies, whatever you are pleased to do, or order, you have just to give it a name, for I'd put me two hands under the feet of anyone that's friendly wid Master Terence."

CHAPTER XXVI

A BOAT-RACE

"MASTER TERENCE" was already in the coffee-room, where he discovered Mr. Lovell, pale and haggard, striding to and fro smoking frequent cigarettes, and utterly reckless of their ashes.

"The coachman, by gad!" he exclaimed, coming to a dramatic halt. "What has brought *you* over here?"

"I came with Miss D'Arcy, who wished to see her sister," he replied imperturbably.

"The devil she did! And so that black-browed young Amazon has taken the field."

"I have a message for you from Lady Fanshawe."

"Yes. Then, let's have it."

"She is very tired and upset, and cannot bring herself to see you. She finds she has made a terrible mistake—and she is returning to Ballybay in a few hours."

"And a pretty fool she has made of me," cried Lovell, with an angry laugh.

"Better be a fool than a knave. No man who really cared for a woman would run away with her."

"Oh, the coachman preaching! Go back and tell Lady Fanshawe that I accept my dismissal—she has the fiend's own temper—but that I think she might have entrusted such a delicate errand to—a gentleman."

Terence confronted him for a moment with a fierce, white face, in which his eyes burned; but he answered in a steady voice—

"If that is your sole grievance against the lady, it is well—for I am a gentleman."

"I dare say! I know you talk like one now, and most chaps can do that. I suppose you were a troop-sergeant in some cavalry regiment—you walk like a cavalryman."

For a moment Terence made no reply; he drew out a match and lit a cigarette. After two or three puffs he said, suddenly—

"You may know the Black Lancers?"

"Yes, I know a lot of them."

"Snowden especially?"

"What's that to you?"

"Did you ever hear him speak of Desmond?"

"His chum? Rather!—nailing rider, brilliant

polo-player, popular chap, drove their coach, broke horse, foot, and Dragoons; went gold-digging. What next?"

"I am Desmond."

"By George!" pausing in his walk.

"Now I am driving the company's coach. I tried ranching, but I could not stand it."

"And how am I to know this?"

"I suppose you would recognise Snowden's writing? Here is a letter I had from him this morning. You may read it if you choose."

"No, no," pushing it back. "I believe you are Desmond. What else do you want?"

"Well, now, I want you to give me that silly woman's silly little letters. Come, if you are a friend of Snowden's, you are bound to be on the square."

Lovell looked at him steadily—for a whole minute the two men stood and confronted one another, so to speak, eye to eye—then he went to his suit-case, pulled out a packet of letters, and flung them on the table.

"Take them!"

"Complete?"

"Yes. I've done with her. And, after all, I'm not sorry; she has the devil's temper and tongue. But a man feels such an ass when the

affair is cut short, and the lady is caught and taken back. I hope it will not leak out in town."

"Nor *here*," added his listener, with emphasis. "Well, we will do our little best. They start at daybreak to get in first, for Sir Greville will be back at Ballybay by noon."

"By George, I should not wonder if it was a dead heat!"

"I hope not. Look here, I must ask you to respect my disguise." Lovell nodded. "The fact is, I make a good income: the open-air life suits me. I like being among horses, and a man must live—and *not* on his friends. Well, then, good-bye; you can tell Snowden you've met me, if you like."

"No, I don't think I shall, for he might ask for details. You are a real good chap, Desmond—just what they said—and I show up damned badly in this business," and he held out his hand.

Terence went upstairs, and once more knocked at the sitting-room door; it was opened by Maureen, with her finger to her lips.

"She's asleep," she whispered.

"It's all right," he whispered back. "*He* is going. I think he will hold his tongue; and here are the letters," handing her the packet.

"You are indeed a most wonderful man. Mrs. O'Hara was right—every one seems to do what you require. A hundred—hundred—thousand thanks!"

He made an impatient little gesture, and said, "Never mind—you owe me nothing, and I hate thanks. Go now and rest; you will have your work cut out to-morrow. Mrs. O'Hara will give you your breakfast, and the horses are the best in the parish—the bishop's own pair," and a smile flickered on his lips.

"And you?"

"Oh, I am going back over the hills; I will be in Ballybay before you, and once more Terence the coachman."

She looked at him gravely—her eyes were wet and shining—and held out her hand. He took it in his own, pressed it for a second, dropped it abruptly, and was gone.

* * * * *

Punctually at six o'clock the following morning the two ladies started for their drive of forty-five miles. Kerry horses are accustomed to long journeys, and these, with half an hour for bait, went along in capital style. Maureen sat with her watch in her hand, whilst her sister dozed. (It was wonderful how easily Nita shuffled off her burdens on to the shoulders of

other people.) As they came to the point of the last hill, overlooking Ballybay, she noticed a boat coming in quickly, with a sail. It was surely Sir Greville, a little before his time. Her eyes followed the sail anxiously. Oh, how the boat seemed to skim over the sea like a bird! At last she opened her window, and spoke to the driver.

"Do you see that boat there, with the brown sail, making for Ballybay?"

"An' to be sure I do, miss."

"I want to get in before it touches land—to be first, if even by two minutes."

"I don't think it can be done, miss; they are within a couple of mile, and we are four off, and at the tail of a long journey."

"I don't wish you to be cruel to the horses, but you really *must* race that boat—it is a matter of almost life and death. Get in first, and I will give you ten pounds; remember, our road is all downhill."

So it was—a capital road too, but with sudden curves and corners. The driver settled to his work, urging his lagging horses, and tore down that smooth decline at a truly breakneck pace; although the carriage rocked from side to side, Nita still slept peacefully as a child, whilst Maureen watched the sea with straining eyes and

a beating heart. When they were yet within two miles of Ballybay she saw the brown sail gaining, gaining steadily ; nearer and nearer it crept to the shore. At last it was hauled down —*the boat had won.*

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CHAPTER XXVII

SADDLING THE WRONG HORSE

SINCE the boat had won the race, the carriage abated its pace in consequence of Maureen's commands, and merely arrived at the hotel at a steady, every-day trot. Meanwhile, Sir Greville and Mrs. Duckitt had landed, and received an effusive welcome; the lady volubly narrating that she had twisted her ankle on one of the 620 steps of the Great Skellig, and been unable to move, and how Sir Greville had nobly stuck by her and brought her safely back! Yes; here she was, as brisk as ever, although limping and leaning on a stick. Whilst she chattered away, her companion looked round vainly for his two relatives, then walked into the sitting-room—empty; he proceeded upstairs—his wife's door was locked; he called—no answer; he went to Maureen's room—it was empty also, the bed had not been slept in. *What* did it all mean?

In the corridor he came face to face with Mr. Foulcher, who wore an expression suitable for funerals, and drew him gravely into his own apartment with an action that spoke whole volumes of commiseration.

"I'm truly sorry for you, my poor fellow," he began, "and I thought I'd just break it gently to you, first."

"Break what?" enquired Sir Greville sharply.

"I don't believe people suspect—you are so popular—the hotel people think so much of you; they have kept it very quiet and dark."

"Dark? Out with it at once!" cried Sir Greville, whose anxiety had mastered his self-command. "Out with it, instead of meandering round, or I shall go mad!"

"They think your wife is laid up with a bad headache—since this time yesterday."

"Where is she?" he shouted, and Lizzie, who was passing, halted to listen. Sir Greville was rising grand ructions.

"Gone off to Shule to overtake her sister, who has run away with the good-looking coachman."

"Good God!"

"Yes, and I declare here they are!" drawing his attention to a pair of smoking horses and a

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closed carriage, out of which stepped first Maureen, in a riding-habit, and then his wife, looking pitiaibly dishevelled and shattered.

As the ladies entered the hall Sir Greville hurried down to meet them. He was in a dumb rage, and alarmingly livid. Maureen, who was saying a word to the driver, made him a quick little sign, but Sir Greville merely glared, as he received his wife with tender concern, took her hand gently, and led her tottering steps to her sitting-room, where she immediately subsided into an armchair and violent hysterics.

"Well, now I'd like to know what you have got to say for yourself, you shameless girl!" he demanded, stammering with passion. "And just look at the condition of your poor sister, and the state she is in, from her anxiety and her miserable journey after you. Never mind, my own darling," soothing Nita. "It is all right—I'm here. Now don't, don't! Here are your salts. I'll get you some champagne." Then, in another key, to Maureen, "I wonder you dare to stand there and not cover your face for shame! If ever I'd have sworn by any girl, it would have been by Maureen D'Arcy. But you are worse than base; you meanly take advantage of my absence—unavoidable absence

—to trick your poor, simple sister, and to make a low runaway match with that blackguard."

"What blackguard?"

"The coachman—who apes being a gentleman! Oh, Mr. Foulcher saw it all and gave me a hint—for which I grossly insulted him. He assured me that you wrote notes to the fellow and met him—oh! you don't know what you've done; I'll *never* believe in a girl again—never!"

Maureen all this time was standing, as it were, guarding the hearth. She was as white as a sheet, and shaking, but absolutely silent; the only sounds were Lady Fanshawe's long-drawn sobs and Sir Greville's angry voice. Suddenly she turned about, snatched at the letter behind her. He saw the superscription and made a dash, but she was too quick; already it was in four pieces and crumpled tightly in her hand.

"That letter was addressed to me, you thief!"

"It was not meant for you now."

"No—your leave-taking note! And now you are caught and brought back, it is null and void. My poor little brave darling, so unused to such pursuits, and journeys, and scenes, how much do you owe her! When you wanted to run away with someone you might at least have chosen a gentleman. Of course, *he* is

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bitterly disappointed ; he has lost the great heiress."

"Greville, be silent!" cried the girl, stung beyond endurance. "You don't know what you are doing; you are talking like an old woman, and are saying things you will regret. You had better look after Nita, who is very tired and ought to rest;" and she walked out of the room, leaving one quarter of the letter on the carpet.

At the top of the stairs she encountered Mrs. Duckitt, more weather-beaten than ever, hobbling along with the aid of a stick, and brimming over with news and questions.

"I'm very glad to see you back, my dear," she exclaimed.

"The same to you," with a wan smile.

"Were you uneasy about us?"

"Not in the least. My sister was rather anxious."

"She needn't have been; he quite enjoyed himself—never had such sea-fishing in his life! But I had an awful time. Coming down those narrow steps in a great hurry, I twisted my ankle—such agony you cannot imagine. I'd have screamed, only for shame. Of course, he couldn't well abandon me; he had to help me up to the lighthouse, and to see the boat go off



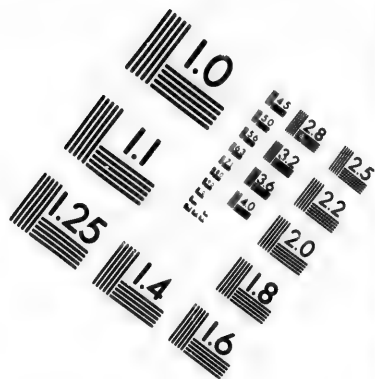
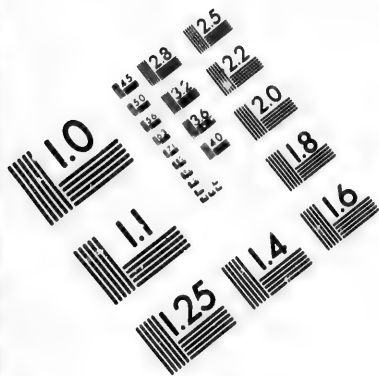
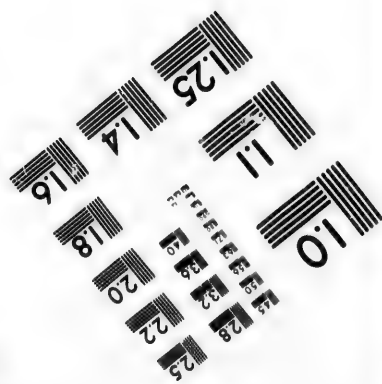
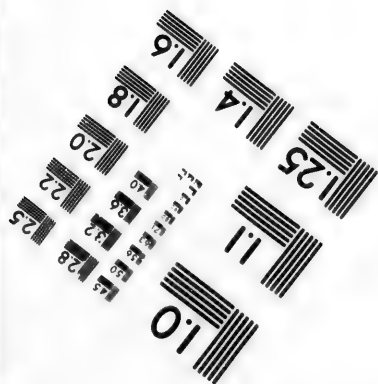
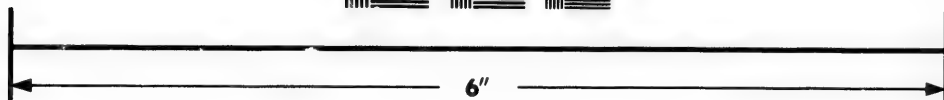
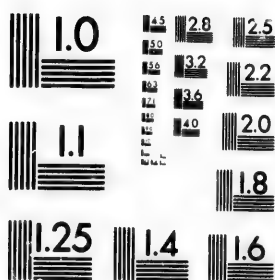


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without him. It was very hard lines, and he was rather low and grumpy, I will admit, and kept wondering what his wife would say, or think, or do, and really would have ventured away in the gale if he had been allowed."

"I am glad he was prevented," said Maureen (which was magnanimous, considering all things).

"Yes. We persuaded him to fish and keep quiet; I was obliged to sit indoors nursing my poor ankle. However, here we are, safe and sound, you see; and better late than never."

"Yes."

"I'm going to-morrow by the early coach, but before that we really must have a comfortable talk. Old Fouché is looking so important, and bursting with some secret about *you*."

"You should only believe half you see, and nothing that you hear," rejoined Maureen, as she made her escape, but merely to be confronted by Julia, who awaited her at her chamber door, with arms folded and lips sternly compressed.

The instant Maureen approached, she opened them to say, "I know *all* about it, miss. And I declare to you, I'm so upset, I don't know what I'm doing. I feel as if there was a thrashing-machine in me head this minute."

"I don't know what you mean, Julia."

"I mean, miss, that I know the *truth*. I know who went on the coach and who went on horseback. And when I heard Mr. Foulcher giving out his great big lies, and his laughs and ugly jokes, I was that ashamed you could have put a match to me face. I declare to God, if Terence hears him, there will be a funeral."

"Whatever you know, or think you know, Julia, please keep to yourself," replied Maureen, faintly. "You will grant me a great favour if you will do this. I'm very tired, and I'm going to rest," and she nodded her head in token of dismissal (for Julia would gladly have remained to talk over the subject till nightfall).

Oh, what a relief to lock herself into her room, take off her habit, have a cold bath, close the blinds, and lie down!

What a twenty-four hours! Maureen felt aged by twenty-four years; and what would be the end of it? Of course, she must bear the blame. Yes, if Greville thought that she, an unmarried girl, had disgraced herself for ever — what would he do if he discovered that the culprit was his own pretty Nita? Thus planning and wondering, she fell fast asleep.

Maureen awoke about five o'clock, and was informed that Lady Fanshawe was laid up with

a "cruel headache," and Sir Greville was gone to the lake. She dressed herself in a pretty, thin gown, drank a cup of tea, and then went out into the garden to get a breath of the cool sea-air. As she loitered up and down the grass tennis-ground, she caught sight of Lost. Oh, if she could but see his master! Yes, there he was in the distance. She took hold of the dog, who struggled violently and barked and whined till his owner turned about, came towards them, and stood at the other side of the railings. He noticed that Miss D'Arcy was pale—her eyes looked dark and anxious.

"Were you in time?" he asked, without preamble.

"Yes and no; we were twenty minutes later than the boat, though we raced it at full gallop. I got the letter, however, and tore it up."

"That's all right; and Sir Greville suspects nothing?"

"Nothing as far as Nita is concerned, but he is furious with me. Oh, how can I tell you? But I must—and *now*," glancing nervously over her shoulder. "This is my only opportunity; half measures are of no use—you will have to help me." She grew white and red by turns, glanced at him, and hesitated.

"Of course, I'll help you. What is it?"

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"To allow him"—she paused, then repeated—"to allow him to go on believing that—that——"

"Yes, yes, he may think what he pleases as far as I'm concerned! What is he to go on believing?"

"That it was *I* who ran away."

"What! With Lovell?"

"No," and she pressed her fingers convulsively to her throat, and faintly articulated the words—"with *you*."

Then, indeed, ensued an expressive pause; the only sound that broke the silence was the crop, crop, crop of a sheep who was feeding outside the palings.

Terence remained motionless, as if turned into stone, but the grasp of his hand on the woodwork gradually tightened, till finally the lath broke with a sharp snap.

Meanwhile, Maureen stood with bent head, tremulous lips, and blazing cheeks. At length the sudden throwing up of a window startled her into speech; she made an effort, and continued breathlessly:—

"The evidence is complete. We were seen to leave the yard together at dusk, to cross the Sliev Mountain, and to ride into Shule; my sister followed me, according to report, and

brought me back. Sir Greville was just in time to witness our arrival, and instantly concluded that I was the culprit. I never saw anyone so angry, never in all my life. He called me"—and her voice trembled—"a base, treacherous, shameless wretch; a hypocrite, a thief—for I seized his letter and destroyed it before his face."

"And your sister stood by and allowed this?" asked Terence, in a cold, stern voice.

"Yes, she is such an awful coward—and discovery means everything in the world to her, for she does love him."

"I must say she has a curious way of showing it," muttered Terence.

"Greville cannot harm me—I am of age, and my own mistress. By-and-by he may pardon me, but he would *never* forgive her. I am of sterner stuff than Nita; I can give up—I can bear things."

"Such as the loss of your reputation?"

Maureen started violently, and coloured to the temples.

"Oh, Mr. Desmond!" she exclaimed, "how can you add to my troubles? I've been thinking that you have been like—like my brother; and now I feel just as if you had struck me across the face with a whip."

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"Forgive me, Miss D'Arcy!" he implored. "If I *were* your brother, I would come down heavily on someone. I would never permit you to shelter others behind your good name. Have you counted the cost?"

And he looked her straight in the eyes.

"Yes; and I will pay the reckoning."

"Have you thought of the little unchallenged lie that may grow, spread, and poison your days, and blight your life? I suppose you know the saying about giving a lie an hour's start?"

She drew herself up, and flashed him a proud glance as she answered, "My conscience is clear. A lie is a lie, and I am not afraid."

"But I am," he admitted quietly. "I have been longer in the world than you have."

"Then, there is no more to be said," and she drew back a step. "I have asked you this great favour in vain. You will not help us. After all, what is my sister's happiness to you? I will give her your answer. You are afraid."

"Afraid!" he repeated indignantly. "I? I am afraid for *you*. Do you suppose that I am thinking of myself? Wait!" as she was about to turn away. "Look here, I will stand by you at any cost. You shall never ask in vain; I will do whatever you require."

Yes ; a woman has enormous power over the man who is in love with her.

Here was Terence Desmond, who hated all lies and double-dealing, prepared, for the sake of a pair of lovely, reproachful eyes, to risk his own stainless honour and this girl's good name.

"I am to countenance this hideous falsehood, and allow it to be believed?"

"Only for two days," she faltered ; "in two days we shall be gone for ever." She had grown very white, and suddenly covered her eyes with her hand, as she added, "It is horrible, but it is the only way—for——"

"Well, sir!" cried a loud, sharp voice, "so I meet you face to face, and catch you in flagrant misconduct. How dare you speak to this lady after your notorious escapade? How dare you?" repeated Sir Greville, stammering with passion. "You have disgraced my family ; my poor wife is seriously ill, the result of her efforts to reclaim her unfortunate sister. A horse-whipping is what you deserve!"

The coachman gave a short, derisive laugh, and certainly the idea of the little baronet chastising that tall, powerful young fellow was extremely ridiculous. At this critical period Maureen fled.

"I was absent," continued Sir Greville, "and

like a cur, you took advantage of the opportunity to run off with the heiress——”

“What heiress?”

“Come, now, you need not pretend. Every Irishman has an eye for a rich wife. Do you mean to stand there and tell me that you were not aware that Miss D’Arcy has nearly half a million?”

“Half a million!”

The muscles of the coachman’s face twitched, his lips became ashen. For a moment he made no reply; at last he answered in a hoarse voice, “I swear I believed her to be as poor as myself.”

“And I swear that you are a liar!” raved the other man.

Terence looked at him steadily. His face was deadly white, his eyes shone dangerously, but he remained mute.

“You must leave this!” continued Sir Greville, in a tone of sharp command. “I don’t want the scandal to get out.”

“You have only to hold your tongue, and you need not be alarmed on that score; but I shall not leave Ballybay. My work is here.”

“Then promise me you will never speak to Miss D’Arcy as long as we remain—or write.”

“and

"Yes, I am quite ready to promise that; though what is the use of making a promise to a man who calls me a liar?"

"I never have been so shocked in my life," announced Sir Greville, who was cooling a little. "I'd have staked my life on my sister-in-law; and why should she choose *you*—a girl that has refused two coronets?"

To this question he received no reply. The other remained contemptuously silent.

"How, and when, did you make love to her, sir?"

"I never made love to her in my life."

"Then you imply that *she* made love to you; and that's an infernal——"

"Stop!—don't say lie again!" cried Terence, who was now at white heat. "I've stood a good deal, but no man shall call me a liar twice to my face, and I really don't *want* to thrash you. I am, as you may not suppose, a gentleman. I don't mind rough work, or even rough words, but my patience has limits."

"Why, you're nothing but a common coachman!" retorted Sir Greville, his countenance transformed with passion. "An insolent, swaggering scoundrel."

"Even a common coachman has his self-respect and honour," broke in Terence fiercely.

"You descend with a common coachman into the arena of vulgar abuse; if you provoke this common coachman, you may find that——"

He stopped. This was no way to keep his pledge, and he turned about abruptly, and, whistling to his dog, left Sir Greville leaning over the palings, feeling equally baffled and bewildered.

"My dear Maureen," said Mrs. Duckitt, limping into her room, "there are no end of whispers, but I believe nothing. Mr. Foulcher has been telling me a most romantic story about you, and of various mysterious letters and meetings. Of course, I know all about *them*," and she laughed. "When you return to London, you must come and stay with me, whether your sister is willing or no. I believe she has a very low opinion of me.—But, never mind, there is nothing like beginning with a little aversion, and she may be my bosom friend yet—who knows?"

"Who knows?" echoed the girl mechanically.

"By the way, I saw our mutual acquaintance, the coachman, just now; he scarcely noticed my gracious bow. He was evidently awfully put out, and looked as white as death, and yet as black as thunder. Perhaps the Dwarf has upset a coach, or one of the best horses has

suddenly expired, or he has had a row with someone."

"Perhaps," echoed Maureen once more, as she turned away her tell-tale face.

"One thing, however, is certain, and on that I'll stake my family diamonds: there is no *lady* in the case."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE DARING OF THE PENSIONER

FOR two whole days Lady Fanshawe remained in cloister-like seclusion, and Sir Greville felt forsaken and forlorn, as Mrs. Duckitt had departed, and needless to mention he did not condescend to foregather with his sister-in-law. On the third afternoon, as he was getting out of his boat near the bridge, he was suddenly accosted by old Pat, who, with a curiously grim look on his face, asked :—

“Can I spake a word to yer honour ?”

“Yes, of course. What is it ?”

“’Tis in regard to the row and ructions, and all the abuse you are afther putting out on the wrong parties.”

“No !” stopping, and looking at him angrily.

“But I tell ye *yes*. Now, if ye don’t listen to an ould man, ye will be sorry all your days, and so I tell ye.”

"If you were a younger man I'd knock you down!"

"Whist now, yer not yerself, and no wonder. They are keeping it from ye," he added mysteriously. "*She* made him, and was hard set to do it; but he is holding his tongue, and him and her took all the blame on themselves—I mane Terence and Miss D'Arcy." Then he stepped back a yard, as if to give greater force to his statement, and his old eyes sparkled wickedly, as he added:—

"Sure, wasn't it your own lady and Mr. Lovell as ran away, and made a holy show of themselves?"

"You damned old rascal! I've a mind to pitch you over the bridge! How *dare* you say such things to my face?"

"I faced the storming of Delhi, and I'm not afraid to face an angry little man, whose wife is mane enough to hide in her room shamming sick, and let others take her disgrace on them."

This bold harangue utterly deprived Sir Greville of the power of speech; his lips twitched convulsively, but made no sound; his face was livid with passion.

But the dauntless old soldier retained use of his tongue, and continued impressively:—

"I swear by the vestment that what I'm

telling you is true. I've a regard for Terence and Miss D'Arcy, and if others will stand by and see them getting blame—knowing they are to be praised—bedad, I will *not*. They are a bold, true pair, and well matched, though there never was a whisper or look av love between them. Sure, all the world knows as Terence is an honourable man wid high notions."

"What does a half-blind, doting old idiot like you know of honour? I've a good mind to report you!"

"Oh, report away! Begorra, there has been plenty of *reports* here. First and foremost, when you and Mrs. Duckitt went off to the Skelligs—got left on purpose, so they said—and spent three days wid one another, and her ladyship nigh off her head, that was *wan* report. Then there were others, regarding your lady and her gentleman, walking and linking arm in arm after dark, and boating on the lake under a red parasol instead of fishing like respectable people. Oh, there's been no fail-
ing in reports! And there is Miss D'Arcy, the only wan of the family as kept herself quiet and dacent, 'tis *she* got all the blame." Turning up his aged eyes, he piously exclaimed, "Oh, Queen of Heaven! where are ye?"

Sir Greville said nothing. He now recalled, as in a flash, his wife's hostility to Mrs. Duckitt and Maureen's timid hints.

"'Twas partly Julia, my own niece, as made me spake, and make restitution, for she is fond of Miss D'Arcy. She told me as her ladyship felt terribly bad at yer going away wid Mrs. Duckitt, and used to be raging and screeching in her own room with her sister, or whispering and sluthering with the gentleman below. Well, the man went off in the six o'clock coach, and before he went he took her ladyship's bag—her ladyship was not to be disturbed, ye see"—here he actually so far forgot himself as to drop his right eyelid—"but a lady of her make and shape was wid him on the coach with a heavy black fall over her face. At about seven in comes Miss D'Arcy and goes into her sister's room wid a telegram. She come out looking like death, and went below calling for a carriage and pair that blessed minute."

"Yes."

"Av course, she might as well ask them to take down the moon, all the cars being at the Mission. Then she run over to Terence, and was talking to him very earnest outside his door——"

"Go on!" cried his listener hoarsely.

"An' in about a quarter of an hour he come riding into the yard, bringing wid him a splendid fine horse, saddled for a lady. Miss D'Arcy was up on its back in two shakes, and away they went as hard as they could lay leg to ground,—or as if the ould wan was after them. They passed over the Sliev Mountain, got into Shule as soon as the coach, and next morning Terence comes home wid two horses, dead beat, and Miss D'Arcy had her ladyship nice and snug wid her in the carriage. Miss D'Arcy saw yer boat, and offered ten pounds to the driver to be in fust, but ye beat him; howsoever, she give him a good present, which he showed *me*. They had the bishop's own carriage—the saints alone know how they got it; but any way, Terence has influence. Now, what do you say to all that?"

"That I don't believe a word of it, you old scoundrel!"

"Then, will ye tell me how did Lady Fanshawe get over the Sliev na Goil, av ye plase? Sure *she* can't ride! Anyway, there was a letter for you on the chimneypiece."

"There was, and Miss D'Arcy tore it up!"

"I've got a bit here as Julia found in the grate; it's yer own, so ye may read it—if ye can."

Sir Greville seized it—a quarter of a sheet ; yes, in Nita's writing ! His face grew grey as he read :—

“ Mr. Lovell adores and appreciates . . . never been happy with you . . . no use to pursue——”

He dropped the paper as if it were fire, and sat with his head in his hands for quite a long time.

“ Ryan,” he said, after this expressive pause, “ forgive me ; you have opened my eyes ; now hold your tongue.” As he spoke, he tore the paper into twenty pieces.

“ Aye, I will so. But *you* will do justice. I'm not asking you to let her off, but don't be too seavare ; sure, she's only a flighty, foolish sort of crature.”

His companion winced. To have this old Irish pensioner begging him to be lenient to his wife was surely the culmination of his shame !

Sir Greville never could remember how he got back to the hotel ; but when he stumbled into the little boudoir, where his sister-in-law was sitting, his appearance was that of a stricken man—his face was ghastly. Maureen jumped to her feet and pushed an armchair towards him.

“ I'm all right,” he said, staring at her in a

curious, dazed fashion. "You are a noble girl, but it was of no use. I know all."

"Who told you?" she asked sharply.

"Old Ryan. He could not bear you to be blamed, when it was Nita and that infernal scoundrel. When I think of everything I've said and done, I'm afraid you can never forgive me. At present I am half stunned. I feel as if the mountains had fallen on me and crushed me. However, I shall free myself," rising suddenly.

But Maureen was too swift for him. She was already at the door. There she stood with her back to it, her arms extended, her face alight with passion; the dark oak threw her tall, slender, white-gowned figure into admirable relief. Even Sir Greville, blind with fury, was aware that a most beautiful woman had thrown herself between him and his prey.

"No!" she said imperiously. "You shall not go for five minutes. Greville, you owe me *this*. Forgive her."

"Am I in my dotage? Maureen, this is too much."

"Then, listen to me for five minutes. It was all from love of you——"

"That she ran away with Lovell?" he interrupted furiously.

"Yes, she was beside herself with jealousy. I hinted this to you, but you would not listen. She has always been so accustomed to have you at her beck and call, that to see you apparently inseparable from another woman drove her mad. She used to pour out her feelings to me—she was far too proud to let *you* see them; and the Skelligs was positively the last straw."

"What childish nonsense you are talking!" he broke in.

"It may be so; but four days' absence, people's unfortunate jokes, Mr. Lovell's insinuations, his soothing attentions, his—oh, his folly, finished it. On the fourth day, after I had talked myself stupid and hoarse, I went out for a breath of air. When I returned, thanks to your delay, her fury had broken all bounds, and she had gone off in order to punish you, to make *you* feel what she had suffered."

"Now, do you really think I'm a drivelling idiot, to believe all this?" he demanded, with a bitter sneer.

"You must believe me; if you don't, you will regret it. Nita was sorry before she had gone half a mile; she was heart-broken when I found her. We raced back, and arrived just too late."

"Too late, indeed!"

"You had already drawn the wrong

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conclusion. So I kept silence—the silence of consent—in order to save her.”

“And it was the letter you raced for—the letter you snatched at and destroyed. Well, she is lucky in her sister—a sister in a thousand. Why do you do these things?”

“Because I love her; because I gathered, after father’s visit to England, that Nita was weak and half-hearted, and that I must stand by her. I am standing by her now.”

“God knows you are.”

“And I implore you to forgive her, as I forgive you. If I am a sister in a thousand, do you be a husband in a million. Consider the scandal, disgrace, and misery. It would kill her!”

“She ought to have thought of that before. She—and this is absolutely unpardonable—allowed *you* to bear the blame.”

“Oh, Greville, it was you yourself who jumped to the wrong conclusion, surely. That was not her fault.”

“And that fellow Terence—he was mad when I called him a liar and a fortune-hunter.”

Maureen caught her breath. She had grown strangely pale. “A liar and a fortune-hunter!” she repeated.

“Yes, he was going to knock me down, and

I richly deserved it. I am fully alive to what I owe to his extraordinary self-command, and to your amazing efforts and unselfish devotion. I can only say that I envy him his nature, and that I honour you more than ever. And now, Maureen, for the last time, *let me pass.*"

"Only *half* a moment," she pleaded. "My efforts and devotion were nothing—but I must admit that I made a sacrifice that has been agonizing; when I recall it, I feel cold and sick; I can never again hold up my head among other girls. I have grovelled in the dust—I have murdered my pride." As she made this confession, her eyes and her expression were tragic.

"When you believed that it was *I* who had eloped," she continued, in a sort of hoarse whisper, "I assented to the deception, for you are powerless to harm me, and I knew we were leaving Ballybay at once, and all would blow over and be forgotten; even scandals are forgotten—young as I am, I know that."

"What are you driving at? Come, what *was* it?"

"The frightful necessity of asking the coachman to permit this mistake to pass unquestioned. He is a gentleman, or, of course, I never could have done it. But"—and the tears at last stood

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in her eyes—"I'd have given ten years of my life, or my right hand, to have been spared that hideous moment. Imagine it!—I asked this strange man—this young man—to allow it to be supposed that he had run away with me! Is *that* to count for nothing?"

She paused, exhausted, and moved slowly aside, her face as white as her gown.

"Now you may pass," she added, as she turned her back on him, and buried her head in the cushions of the sofa, like one who was utterly worn out.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE PIPE OF PEACE

WHATEVER passed between the Baronet and his wife during a protracted interview, the result was peace; and although Lady Fanshawe's pretty face was almost unrecognisable from the effects of two hours' incessant weeping, yet, when her husband went down to the *table d'hôte*, he left her contrite, subdued, and forgiven—men are but human, and Nita was irresistible.

Immediately after dinner Sir Greville walked straight over to Macgill's, in order to offer Terence an ample apology, and tender his warmest thanks. The *amende* was promptly accepted; and, for more than an hour, the two men smoked together a veritable pipe of peace. Little was said respecting recent events, but various other matters were discussed—such as tobacco, tweeds (the local

manufacture), river-poaching, and pedigree bull-terriers. Seeing that his visitor's eyes had wandered from a shabby tiger-skin to a solid silver ash-bowl, Terence said suddenly—

"I may as well tell you—what both Lady Fanshawe and Miss D'Arcy know—though I am only Terence the coachman here, my real name is Desmond. You see, I can talk like a Kerry man, and I pass in the crowd."

Sir Greville nodded acquiescence.

"I was once in the service—there I am," handing down a polo group. "That was taken in Lucknow five years ago; no one would recognise me, would they?"

"You have shaved off your moustache, and you look older—otherwise you are easily spotted. Then," with a sudden movement, placing the frame on the table, he exclaimed, "So that was your story the old man told us—and you are The Desmond?"

"Yes; my grandfather and grandmother were extravagant—times change—my father was always open-handed. My brothers and I were educated at Wellington, and I went into the service. My mother died before the great smash—she was spared that, thank God!—and when it came, I happened to be in India, spending my allowance freely—and more. All

at once I heard of my father's ruin, and, the next mail, of his death." (Sir Greville nodded sympathetically.) "I came home and tried to pull things together, but they were beyond that stage; I found myself penniless. I had a good many friends; and you have to be a really destitute young man before you can grasp how little friends, even with the best intentions, can do for you. I was not a bit clever, though I was well enough up in my profession, and I had hoped to devote my life to it. I could do nothing without brains or capital, you see; I could ride a hurdle-race, drive a coach, lead a squadron—but that was no use."

"You might have got a secretaryship."

"I hate writing, and am an awful duffer at accounts; I like being out of doors. I went off to a ranche in Mexico, and got along all right till I fell over a precipice one fine day, broncho and all; he was killed. I was only "kilt," but I was rather smashed up, and obliged to come back to England. My memory had become a little faded, and, though I have some real staunch friends, I cannot bear to ask a favour. This billet came in my way, and I've been here threc years."

"And are the Desmond estates completely swamped?"

"Not quite; though in a bad way. There is Madame Desmond, my grandmother; she keeps up considerable state still, and has a large house in Mountjoy Square, Dublin. In ninety years she has never learnt the value of money; and is recklessly extravagant—it's rather an inversion of the usual state of affairs. Here am I, the grandson, vainly trying to curb her wild expenditure."

"No, I never heard of such a case!—a prodigal grandmother!"

"I fancy it's unique—if that is any comfort. She has first charge on the property—one thousand a year, which is paid to the day."

"I call that very comfortable."

"She calls it beggary!—and it is not nearly sufficient. I scrape up some more—I must, you see. She was overwhelmed with debts when I came home, and these had to be paid at any cost."

"I shouldn't have paid them—no, not a penny."

"Oh, I think you would; you could not allow the last Madame Desmond, brought up with the great traditions of the family, to die a bankrupt and a pauper."

"Can you not restrict her outlay?"

"You little know my grandmother; but I do my best. She is a hale, haughty old lady, and

terribly proud. If she guessed at my trade, she would go off in a fit."

"Then, I should make a point of enlightening her."

"No, on the contrary, I lie a little ; and she imagines that I am shooting or paying visits—occasionally in winter I do stay with old pals—I actually still belong to my club ; I've got a frock-coat somewhere, so don't be surprised if you come across me in Piccadilly some day !"

"I hope I shall. What a romantic story !"

"This is not very romantic," with a motion of his pipe.

"And your own place is in Chancery ?"

"Yes ; and likely to remain there as far as I can see."

"I wonder you don't marry an heiress ?"

"I've not come to *that*," and he coloured. "I shall live and die a bachelor—the last of the Desmonds."

"I hope not ; you'll find your luck will turn. If you come to London, you must let us know, and look us up."

"Thank you."

"My wife and her sister are off the day after to-morrow."

"Are they ? I dare say they have had about enough of this place."

"Yes; they are going to pay a visit to the D'Arcys in Dublin—their cousins."

"I believe they live in Mountjoy Square—my grandmother knows them intimately."

"That is a pleasant coincidence. Well," rising, "I know you are an early bird, so I won't stay any longer. I shall see you again, for I'm going to stop on a bit. You must come over and smoke with me—and dine."

Terence smiled and shook his head. "It is awfully good of you to ask me, but I never go anywhere; I am below the salt. Imagine the scene if you introduced me at the *table d'hôte*!"

"Then, I'll come and look you up, if I may?"

"All right, do. I shall be delighted if you will," said Terence, as he accompanied his guest to the door, and stood and watched him down the street.

* * * * *

Two mornings later the early coach, with its shining chestnuts, carried a heavy load, for the season was waning. Sir Greville, who was escorting his ladies to the Junction, occupied the box seat; but Nita, her sister, and Taffy were far at the back. As they clattered up the town in the fresh morning breeze and the bright sunshine, Maureen felt that she could

hardly raise her eyes. She was leaving the kingdom she loved, with its lochs veiled in water-lilies, its pansy-purple mountains, its moist wooing air and soft Irish tongue. She saw the scene through tears; she was gazing on it all for the last time! As for Nita, she looked back and drew a long, happy sigh.

"Hateful place!" she cried, "how thankful I am to leave it! How I hope I may never see it again! What a pace we are going at! Oh, I see Terence is driving—well, I always feel perfectly safe with *him*: I would even go on the box-seat.—Why did *you* not take the box-seat, Maureen?" But Maureen was silent.

Meanwhile, the coach sped along over the familiar road that recalled the runaway at every turn; at last, they were rattling down to Carra Station, with five minutes to spare.

There Maureen descended, and glanced about reflectively. Was it barely two months since she had stood there, waiting to ascend a similar vehicle, and with so many unexpected events awaiting her? It was truly the unexpected that had happened! She had seen down to the bottom of her own heart; she knew, but scarcely dared to put it into shape, even in her thoughts, that all the love—first love, last love—she had in her nature, was given to that man

who held the team together whilst he conversed indifferently with some groom.

Suddenly the groom took the horses' heads, the driver swung down ; he was coming towards them !

"A lovely day for your journey"—to Lady Fanshawe (was he thinking of her last expedition ?). "I hear you are going to the D'Arcys in Mountjoy Square ; they know my grandmother—Madame Desmond, and perhaps you may see her. If so, please don't give me away."

"You know I am discretion itself," rejoined Lady Fanshawe ; and she stood laughing and chattering for nearly five minutes, anxious to capture—even at the eleventh hour—the goodwill and admiration of Terence.

Terence, who remained strangely irresponsible, was secretly beside himself with impatience. Would she *never* go—and leave him one moment alone with Maureen ?

At last she hurried off in frightened quest of Taffy, and he turned to her sister and said—

"I came to wish you good-bye."

Two little words ; but they contained, as old Dan had said, "a deal of grief." His grave set face was white, his eyes were riveted on her half-averted profile.

As for Maureen, she found it impossible to

articulate—there was something throbbing in her throat. The silence was intolerable whilst she stood motionless waiting for him to speak ; the bell rang impatiently, and he suddenly lifted his hat and walked back to the coach.

“Come along, Maureen ! Do get in !—get in !” cried Nita. “Have you got the dog-ticket, Grev ? Oh, run and get a ticket—we are just off.”

“Well, there’s no time now !” and he scrambled in, reckless of the consequences.

Maureen had secured a seat at the window, and, as they glided slowly out of the station, she looked and saw the coach and Terence. He was turning the horses, and never cast one glance towards the train. There he went ! He was gone !

“What on earth is the matter ?” demanded Lady Fanshawe ; “you are as pale as a ghost. You look as if you had never closed your eyes all night.”

“I’ve got a—a—one of *your* headaches,” she answered with a smile, and she crossed over and seated herself in the far corner.

Poor Maureen ! it was something much worse than a headache which caused her to look so white ! She was suffering from a heart-ache, for the first time.

CHAPTER XXX

"THE TEMPTATION OF TERENCE"

SIR GREVILLE FANSHAW was not a man who appreciated his own society ; he liked a cheery companion or sympathetic listener, and, when he set out alone for his usual Sunday tramp, he felt depressed—not to say desolate ! Nira, Maureen, Mrs. Duckitt, and many pleasant associates, had all departed ; Mr. Foulcher had been among the first flight—not that *he* came under the later category—and the poor little Baronet actually found himself regretting the loss of Taffy !

It was a fine afternoon—the first Sunday in October—the sky was a pale whitish blue, flecked with a few ragged clouds. The sea, for once, was tranquil. Sir Greville kept near the coast, for a change, and walked up a long, deserted road that hung above the cliffs, and, in the good old days, had actually been used for posting, though honest tradition declared that,

at "the pinch of the hill"—a nearly perpendicular ascent—the horses had given place to men who had dragged the conveyance up with ropes. Whatever the road's history, it was an obsolete track now, thickly covered with grass, and much affected by goats and stray cattle. Sir Greville arrived at the summit of "the pinch," climbed over a tall stile into a recently reaped oat-field, and made his way to the wall overlooking the bay. The bay was drowsy, and moved with an indolent, scarcely perceptible rocking, upon its sandy bed. There was no living creature to be seen but a few enterprising crows and sea-gulls, who were straggling along the shore in search of certain doubtful delicacies left by the tide.

Yes! There, motionless as part of a rock—just below him—Terence Desmond leant his arms on a loose stone wall and gazed out to sea with a strange, fixed look on his face. What did it signify? Sir Greville had no imagination. How was he to guess that it expressed measureless despair? He merely noticed that Terence was white and haggard. Had he been ill?

Ill or well, Sir Greville was delighted to see him, and hastened to accost him most cordially.

"Hullo! how are you?" he called out. "I

say, you are not looking up to the mark ! Been seedy ? ”

“ No, I’m never ill ; I’m as strong as a horse. In fact,” with a laugh, “ I wish some of the horses were as sound as I am.”

“ Then, you have some trouble on your mind ? Down on your luck ? ”

“ I’ve no luck to be down on. We all have our blue devils—our dark days.”

“ And, only for you, my life would have been all dark days ! ”

“ No, no ; it was Miss D’Arcy who carried *that* through.”

“ I tell you what—I’ve been hearing a great deal about that business since I last saw you ; I feel that I shall be in your debt all my life.”

A pause. “ Honestly, Desmond, I cannot understand why you, a stranger, and a man with your hands full, came forward so promptly and befriended my wife and sister ? ”

No answer. They were now walking down the hill together.

“ You managed to get saddle horses ; you recovered certain letters—you see my wife has kept back nothing—you obtained a carriage at a heavy price.” He paused for a reply.

At last Terence spoke, and, as he spoke, he halted and confronted his companion.

"I have been debating whether to answer your question or to let it slide. On the whole, I believe, as a man of honour, I ought to answer you. I all but *stole* one of the saddle-horses, I hurried over the Sliev Mountain, I confronted Lovell, and I gave up my secret in exchange for a carriage. I did all this—not, as you may imagine, from pure philanthropy—but for—I am sure I have said enough. You understand."

"Yes; you did it for Maureen. You love her!"

"I do. You are her guardian, and I tell you the simple truth. I am not susceptible; my unemotional nature has stood me well; but the day I drew up to allow that runaway to pass—driven by a woman with a cloud of hair and the face of a heroine—a man beside me cried, 'There's the girl for *me*!' and in my heart I echoed his words. Of course, in stern, everyday life, she was not the girl for a coachman—no, not even when I honestly believed her to be your poor relation, a penniless young lady."

"Penniless!" repeated Sir Greville. "She has—nearly half a million!"

Terence nodded impatiently and resumed, "When you fished with Mrs. Duckitt, and

your wife boated with Mr. Lovell, I noticed Miss D'Arcy wandering about happy and alone, making friends among the weavers and fisher-folk. I kept severely aloof, for even a child who has not been hurt dreads the fire! Sometimes, on a sharp, exhilarating morning, when the horses were going well up to their bits, my spirits rose, and I began to speculate on what might happen when my grandmother had passed away (she is ninety); and if some of the deeds were found?—then I determined to resume my station, and ask Miss D'Arcy to be my wife."

"You have never dropped a hint?"

"No! I have only spoken to her six times in my life, and she has never given me a thought."

"And why don't you speak? Upon my word! I believe she likes you—and you shall have a fair field. Come and stay with us in town, and wear your frock-coat and claw-hammer. You have my best wishes—and Nita's too. We will give a lame dog a good lift over the stile."

"No; no, thank you, all the same. It is out of the question. Miss D'Arcy does not care twopence for me; she is a great heiress. I couldn't do it. Imagine living on one's wife!"

"And do you mean to let her go and pass out of your life?" And it was now Sir Greville's turn to halt and confront his companion.

"Yes; I shall pass out of hers—which comes to the same thing. I suppose most men go through this;" and he turned his handsome, haggard face on the little baronet. "I've been so unfortunate as to take it late, and at a bad age for—forgetting."

"But why give her up? I wish you luck. 'Faint heart never won fair lady,' you know. She is one in a thousand—a little impetuous and unconventional, but a flawless diamond; her heart is like a fine crystal."

"And perhaps as cold and hard! Sir Greville, it would be an amusing copy for some comic paper to publish this scene between us—you, a well-known man of the world, wealthy and popular, urging an obscure and beggarly driver to marry (if he can) your beautiful ward—an heiress. If your friends heard you, they would declare that you were not responsible for your actions, and suggest a padded ward."

"But I am not anxious for Maureen to marry Terence the coachman," returned the other, a little testily.

"No?"

"But I believe she would be a happy girl, if

she married the descendant of Macarthy Mor, Prince of Desmond."

"Yes; and reside in a castle without a roof, and live on air. No—no! don't tempt me. My own inclinations require no ally—it is all I can do to resist them."

"And you *can* resist. I notice that, for an Irishman, you have an enormous power of self-control."

"Self-command means self-respect. To resist temptation means a tough fight, and it does not always flee; it comes slinking back, and looks in at you through doors and windows when you least expect it! Sometimes, in a frenzy, I've been tempted to go to Dublin and meet Miss D'Arcy on equal footing, to rout up those Chancery lawyers. But the law is so deadly!—I feel as if I were tied up in a sack, powerless to move—and the idea is madness."

"Then, your pride is greater than your love."

"No. That—well, God knows, what my love is—no use to speak of it. She will soon forget me; I shall make no sign. I shall be silent—and he who is silent is forgotten."

"And you can do this?" demanded Sir Greville, with an awed expression.

"Yes, I can make myself do anything."

"I, unfortunately, am lacking in your iron self-control, as you have excellent reason to know. I was like a wild beast when I discovered, as I believed, that Maureen, whom I looked upon as a type of exalted virtue, had fallen from her high estate. The disenchantment was overwhelming. She is a spirited girl, and in you she would find her—her match."

"Sir Greville, it is very good of you to think so well of me, to consider that I am worthy of Miss D'Arcy; even if I were, fate stands between us with a drawn sword. She might, perhaps, have married Desmond of the Black Lancers; but Terence the coachman"—here his voice was hoarse and broken—"is out of the question! And this is where our roads part. I'm due up at the farm before dark."

"Have your own way!—but I say, look here, Desmond: on Wednesday night we are going to make a regular descent on those night-poachers on the Leam; will you join us? It will be rather exciting, and we may have a fight; no Irishman can resist *that*. Eh?"

"Well, it certainly is a temptation; I'm rather partial to a shindy, I must confess. I'll come, if I can possibly manage it. Let me know the hour;" and with a wave of his stick, he

turned up a goat-path—a short cut to his destination.

Sir Greville stood below on the road gazing after him for some moments, then he took off his cap, scratched his short grey locks, and sighed profoundly, ere he once more moved onwards in the direction of Ballybay.

As he walked along he gave utterance to his thoughts, more than once. "Irish pride—Irish pride. Yes"—to a little black cow which raised her head, and stared at him from among a thicket of fuchsias—"there's no one prouder than a poor Irish gentleman, with the blood of an old race in his veins."

CHAPTER XXXI

"MADAME"

THE D'Arcys lived in a fine old house in Mountjoy Square (a region from which fashion has ebbed to the South side of Dublin, but which still boasts the pride of other days, and mansions retaining some degree of their former magnificence). The family consisted of Mrs. D'Arcy, aunt by marriage to the sisters; one son, Connor, a civil engineer, who lived at home; and two pretty daughters, Bryda and Kathleen. They made their English relatives most warmly welcome, and, although they were all enchanted with Nita's pretty face and pretty gowns, there was far more "to come and go on," in Maureen, as they expressed it. "*She* was a true D'Arcy!"

The early part of October is scarcely the season to see Dublin at its best; but the D'Arcy girls had a wide acquaintance, and soon their

guests found themselves involved in a round of entertainments. This was greatly to the taste of Nita after her long enforced fast from all festivities. She enjoyed exhibiting her smart frocks, and finding herself the focus of many admiring eyes; but Maureen preferred to roam about old Dublin, or make excursions by car or rail, or to turn over book-boxes on Wellington Quay, and delve among the back-shops of Liffey Street.

* * * * *

"Do you know an old Mrs. Desmond who lives in this square?" enquired Nita, one day at luncheon, *à propos de rien*.

"We know Madame Desmond. I wish I saw her face if anyone ventured to address her as 'Missis,'" answered Kathleen.

"Then, I should like to try the experiment," rejoined Nita, as she helped herself to grapes. "Does she live near here?"

"At number ninety-five—nearly her own age. She is as proud as Lucifer, and never 'receives' anyone who has been in trade—no, not even wine or whisky."

"Good gracious, how antediluvian!"

"She admits us because we are D'Arcys—vastly inferior to the Desmonds, of course. She maintains the social footing of three

hundred years ago," continued Connor. "She does the most outrageous things, which are kindly attributed to a weak mind; but she is as sane as I am. She sends people down their cards, or has them left at their own area gate; and she keeps others (who consider themselves swells) sitting in the hall awaiting her good pleasure."

Maureen, who was listening eagerly, remembered how she had done this to Madame's own grandson!

"Does she live alone?" she asked.

"Yes. Her granddaughter is married to a baron something, and her grandson is a young man who mixes in smart society; he rarely comes to see her—but I believe his cheques are regular."

"She is a detestable old woman!" cried Kathleen. "Her arrogance and extravagance were the ruin of her family. She has nothing of her own, except the house and its contents: lovely furniture, pictures, silver, and jewels—all heirlooms. She keeps up great state still—at her grandson's expense."

"When I meet her," said Connor, "I always sympathise with the Scythians, who killed and ate their aged as soon as they became long-winded and troublesome. Madame is a rank

bad specimen—one of a narrow-minded, selfish class, who embitter the lives of their descendants, and demand the sacrifice of their individual rights, not to speak of their entire youth! She soliloquises by the hour about the Desmonds, and their Princes, and pedigrees—a played-out race, chiefly thanks to her."

"How was that?" asked Nita with vivacity.

"She poured out their money like water; never thought of the future, and never reckoned the cost. I believe it is the same story still. She has a comfortable carriage, a capital cook, a man-servant, and a maid, though I understand her wretched grandson has not twopence to jingle on a milestone. She is a proud, thankless old termagant!"

"Oh, Kathleen! Kathleen!" expostulated her mother. "She is quite one of the ancient *régime*, an old lady of the most courtly manners."

"To those she likes—I admit that; she can be charming to strangers. If you'd care to inspect her lovely old silver and lace, Nita and Maureen, Bryda will take you in this afternoon—I positively can't face her."

"Thank you. I must confess I would like to see them," answered Maureen, guiltily conscious that the attraction was not Madame herself, but the household gods of Terence Desmond.

"And I should not," said her sister; "I'm going to the *matinée*. I hate cross, proud, talkative old women. Maureen, I wish you joy! Ahem! be *cautious*—you know what I mean;" and she held up a warning finger, and left the room laughing.

* * * * *

"Yes, Madame Desmond was at home," replied a majestic butler; and then he solemnly preceded Maureen and Bryda up a shallow staircase, lined with fine paintings, into an immense double drawing-room.

At first it appeared tenantless—merely full of beautiful furniture of the last century: china, pictures, ivories, and mirrors.

"So you have brought your cousin to see me?" said a weak falsetto voice, belonging to a little lady, who was almost swallowed up in a great high-backed, ill-stuffed chair. "How do you do, Miss D'Arcy?" and she extended two bony fingers, and scrutinized Maureen with a pair of keen black eyes—eyes fifty years younger than her face.

Madame, though unexpectedly small, was remarkably erect; her face was covered with lines, but the features were beautiful still, and clear-cut as in ivory; the expression arrogant beyond all description. She wore her

own white hair covered by a lace cap tied under her chin, in the old style; her gown was rich, puce satin of "stand-alone" quality, a shawl of priceless lace covered her shoulders, and her fingers glittered with diamonds.

"Yes; I've brought my cousin Maureen to see you," said Miss D'Arcy, seating herself as she spoke.

"Not much to see, my dear, is there?" nodding at the visitor, "but you are welcome. I notice that, on wet afternoons, your cousins come in, and exhibit me to their friends as one of the marvels of antiquity—a rare old mummy!"

"Oh, Madame, how can you say so!" boldly retorted Bryda. "You said you would like to see Maureen, as you remembered another Maureen D'Arcy when you were young; and I knew that my cousin would appreciate looking at your treasures."

"All heirlooms; I cannot afford to collect now." She sighed. "You might show Miss D'Arcy the Cuypp and the Vandyke, before the light goes. She knows a good picture when she sees one!"

When the girls returned from a tour into the back drawing-room, where they had cautiously circulated among marvellous china and delicate

ivories, the old lady resumed, with a wave of her hand—

“These are just a few odds and ends I rescued from the wreck. My dear husband gave a thousand pounds for that silver statuette because I set my heart upon it. I am devoted to art ; I can’t endure anything about me that is cheap, or common, or shabby.”

“Yes ; so I can see,” assented Maureen.

“Ah, well, I’m an old woman now. Death has forgotten me, and I’ve outlived my generation. This is a generation of parvenus—there are few well-born people living on their own estates nowadays. Wealth is everything. Some upstarts have had the audacity to intrude on my privacy, to call, to send invitations—persons that would hardly have been received in my grandfather’s kitchen. Ah, money and race have parted company.”

“Not always, I hope, Madame.”

“Well, with very rare exceptions. Look at my grandson ; his forbears were nobles in the eleventh century, and what social status has he?” (What indeed ?) “He and I are the only two left, like the piers of a broken bridge. All the rest have dropped one by one into the valley of death. Ah, I see you looking at that picture. It is a portrait of Nial Desmond,

colonel in the Regiment de Lally ; he was killed at Fontenoy." (Nial Desmond was a handsome gallant, with a laced coat, and with a ruffled hand resting on the hilt of his sword. His eyes seemed to meet Maureen's unflinchingly.) "Terence, my grandson, resembles him," continued Madame. "I wish you knew him, Miss D'Arcy ; I dare say you'd like Terence."

Terence!—how the name quivered through her imagination and dwelt there hauntingly!

"I believe I do know Mr. Desmond, Madame. We met him at Ballybay this season."

"Really! Do you say so!"—now sitting still more erect, and contemplating the girl with a look of piercing attention. "I suppose he was fishing? How he does roam about!—I wonder when he intends to come and see me?"

"He sent you his respects, or his love. I am not quite certain which."

"Not his love," responded Madame, with a sudden compression of her lips. "Terence loves few. He loved his mother ; he is attached to Constance. As for me, I shouldn't wonder if his dog had a larger share of his heart! And what a heart it is!—he has never yet, as far as I know, loved a woman."

"No?"

"He gets that cold nature from his mother's

side, for the Desmonds were always falling in and out of love—half-a-dozen sweethearts in a year. The Macarthys took it seriously, when they got the plague at all ; and Dermont Mor Macarthy, Terence's grand uncle, killed a man for offering an insult to a woman he loved."

"Rather a strong measure !"

"Yes ; and so Terence sent his respects !—much good they do me. If I had my own way, he should live here under my roof and devote himself to my affairs. As it is——" and Madame paused and pressed her lips together.

("As it is," thought her listener, "he works hard to keep you in luxury.")

"He is strikingly handsome—don't you think so ?" she asked. "There is a picture of him over there," pointing to a large, framed photograph, "taken when he was in the Black Lancers. I call it a beautiful face—don't you ?"

"It is a—a—fine face."

"He was most popular in his regiment, I understand. He ought to marry well ; but he does not care for women's society, and he has no money—at least, a very trifling income, which he shares with me. I dare say he is often hard up, for all the Desmonds are prodigiously extravagant. He was always very truthful and straight, but not the least bit clever ; so I'm

afraid he can't live—as some young men do—on his wits."

"No, I should not think so!" Maureen responded with stifled indignation.

"We were lost in amazement when he passed for his commission, but he was set upon it; and whatever a Desmond sets his heart on, he obtains. I wish he would set his heart on an heiress."

"And, of course, she must be of good family," remarked Bryda, now coming forward. She had been all this time dipping into a new magazine. "You would not like him to marry into pork or pickles—would you?"

"My good young woman," exclaimed Madame, "how shockingly brusque you are! You will never have polished manners, never. Terence is the last man to marry anyone who is not of his own degree."

"No? But princesses are rather scarce."

"And pert girls are rather common! Do, pray, sit down and hold your tongue—your cousin interests me, and you do not; you may retire if you choose."

"Thank you, Madame, no; I'll wait for my cousin, and finish this capital story;" and Bryda, with a saucy glance at Maureen, resumed her book.

"Did you know Terence pretty well? How long were you together?" continued Madame.

"About two months."

"Dear me!" And her old eyes expressed interest, curiosity, and interrogation. "Well, I dare say you danced, and boated, and rode together constantly. Of course, you were at the same hotel?"

Maureen coloured with embarrassment as she answered—

"No. Mr. Desmond was not at our hotel."

"Perhaps your hotel was too expensive! Terence has such odd, I may say, vulgar ideas, and always pays cash for everything. Now, in my day, I never paid for anything for three or four years—it wasn't expected. The tradespeople liked bills to run on. Terence got all his peculiar notions from his mother. She was the belle of Dublin when she came out, and a beautiful creature, I must allow; but I never cared for her. One couldn't be expected to like the wife of one's eldest son—who comes after one! Helen died ten years ago. She had a terribly severe conscience, and so has Terence. He hates debt; and, I assure you, he wrote me quite a stiff letter when I sent him in a trifling bill for carriage hire—only ninety pounds."

"He is not well off, I know," said Maureen.

"Has he ever said anything to you about his affairs?" she asked, darting an eager glance.

"Only that the place is in Chancery, and that the title-deeds, and various bonds, have mysteriously disappeared. I suppose, Madame, you have no idea what became of them?"

Madame's ivory cheek became suddenly tinged with pink, as she clutched the arms of her chair with her thin old fingers, and looked straight at her visitor.

"Pray, how should *I* know anything about them?" she enquired rather excitedly. "There was a most ridiculous fuss made some time ago—searchings in boxes and bureaux. They will never be found in my day, please God! for as long as they are missing the castle cannot be sold."

The great bulging, ill-stuffed chair, the old lady's agitation, the angry ring in her voice, gave Maureen an idea: she had a knack of discovering things that never occurred to other people. She glanced at the chair. One shapeless arm was wider than another; on that arm stood a little gold thimble! In the back of the chair, high up, there was a rip in the brocade—a needle and thread were stuck in it. Yes, the deeds were concealed in the stuffing of the chair! (No wonder boxes and bureaux were

ransacked in vain.) The old lady sat upon them for safety, and had recently been making repairs.

"Do you knit much?" asked Maureen, "or do you do needlework?"

"I never put in a stitch now—though, thank God! I'm spared my sight and my senses. Once I embroidered and painted on velvet; it was the accomplishment of gentlewomen in my day, instead of racing round the world on a muddy wheel. But why do you ask?"

It was on the tip of Maureen's tongue to point to the little gold thimble, but she wisely refrained; and before she could compose a reply the door opened, other visitors were announced, and she stood up at once to take leave.

"Well, good-bye, my dear; come in and see me again," said Madame, in a cordial tone. "I like your nice Irish face, and I'll show you my miniatures and diamonds. You can find your way alone next time;" and she nodded significantly at Bryda, who merely smiled in reply.

"Did you ever see such an old Tartar?" asked Bryda, as they left the house. "But I do 't mind her a bit. She often sends for me to play backgammon; and she always has lots

of new books and papers, and lends them to me. I'm sure you'll never suspect that I am quite a prime favourite."

"Never, indeed!" bursting into a laugh.

"Well, I am! She has endowed me with a real pearl—seed-pearl—necklace; and she told me she would like to give me a lovely emerald pendant, only it is an heirloom, and she is saving it for Mr. Desmond."

"There is one thing I know she is saving for him—the deeds."

"The deeds!—the title-deeds!"

"Yes; I fancy she could put her hand on them at a moment's notice."

"Then, why on earth does she not? By the way, is the nephew nice?—we have never happened to see him; his visits are like angels'."

"Yes; we liked him."

"What was he doing at Ballybay?"

"Oh, improving the shining hour. Here we are back again. I wonder if the others have returned?"

"Nita, and Connor, and Katie," said Bryda, entering the drawing-room, "you will all be happy to hear that Maureen has made a favourable impression on Madame. She has specially invited her to go and see her treasures, and actually called her 'dear.'"

"A sprat to catch a salmon!" exclaimed Connor. "She wants to hook an heiress for her grandson."

"Oh, for goodness' sake," cried Nita, who was deep in a letter, and caught the words "salmon" and "hook," "don't, as you love me, let us have any *fishing talk* here!"

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CHAPTER XXXII

THE TORCHING

"TORCHING" was a popular resource for poachers on the river, and on Wednesday night Sir Greville, Terence, Mr. Preston, General Armstrong, and several other gentlemen and bailiffs arrived silently and secretly at the rendezvous, cars and conversation being alike prohibited; and for some distance, in the still night-air, they could distinctly hear the delinquents beating the salmon down to the lowest pool with stones.

"They have a cross-net there," muttered the Judge, who was an experienced poacher. "Will ye listen to the thumping? Oh, but that pool could tell ye! they took fifty out of it wan night last week. Look at the blaze!"

Thanks to the blaze, they were enabled to distinguish quite a number of busy men on the banks, and a quantity of newly speared salmon

glistened and glittered on the grass. The surprise-party took the poachers completely aback; they made a desperate rush for the bridge, and held it—spears, pikes, and other deadly weapons gleaming in the torchlight.

The salmon were neatly laid out at the other side; it was for these that the poachers were prepared to make a bold stand.

"We must capture the fish and the nets!" cried Sir Greville, wild with indignation. "Come on!"

The phalanx of poachers, with grim, weather-beaten faces, looked as stern and fiercely determined as any crowd behind a Paris barricade; they dragged the cart across the bridge and there awaited a charge.

"Damn ye, boys," cried an old water-bailiff, "I see ye're in dread!—ye only want a leader!"

"Here you are, then!" responded Terence, instantly running forward.

He had nothing in his hand but a stout black-thorn, and with that he knocked a spear out of a poacher's grasp and smashed a pike. He was closely attended by Sir Greville, furious at the poachers' audacity, and bitterly envious of the rows of noble salmon. The scrimmage immediately became general, with a hail of

stones, thrusting of pikes, knives, and sticks—in short, it developed into a regular *mêlée*.

Terence was in the thick of it, laying about him vigorously with the skill of an accomplished swordsman, though his weapon was but wood.

"An' will ye look at the coachman, mixing himself up wid fish!" cried a voice. "Keep to yer harses, man alive!"

"All's fish that comes to my net!" he shouted, as he sprang on the cart, and seized a poacher by the collar.

Sir Greville, equally active in his own way, had laid hold of another man, when suddenly all the shouting was silenced by the report of a pistol-shot.

Sir Greville's antagonist had fired. He aimed full at his enemy, but Terence threw up his arm and received the charge in his side.

"Here's the polis!" was the cry; and in another moment the poachers had scattered.

They dissolved into air as by a miracle, or as if the earth had opened her mouth and swallowed them—like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram—for the river bank was full of clever hiding-places; meanwhile, the storming party rallied round the wounded man.

"It's nothing—only a scratch," he gasped. "See, I can walk and stand; it was a spent

bullet. Here, take the fish-ladders, torches, and salmon ;" and he pointed down the bridge. "At least we will carry off the spoils of war."

At this moment the pain became insupportable ; he tottered, and fell.

* * * * *

Two evenings later Lady Fanshawe entered her sister's room with a letter in her hand, and wearing a troubled face.

"Just listen to this—from Grev," and she began—

"We made a raid on the poachers on Wednesday night—two of the fishers, two bailiffs, and old General Armstrong, and several other men. I invited Terence, knowing that an Irishman loves a fight—we got it in style, for they were there in force, throwing stones, torching, and shouting. They barricaded the bridge, which we stormed, led by Terence with a blackthorn! He laid about among the pikes and spears, and carried the position with a stick ; but someone fired at me, and he got a charge in his ribs. He made light of it at first, but later on he had to give in. Now he is in a very bad way. The doctor fears internal hæmorrhage—in which case, his hours are numbered ; and I never felt so sorry for anyone in all my life. I, myself,

have a nasty cut on the head, but it's nothing to signify. Don't be alarmed, little woman; I'll let you know how things go by wire; you need not be anxious about *me*."

"Don't be anxious!—that's nonsense!" concluded Nita, as she folded up the letter. "Greville, I will say, is a man who always makes himself out to be *half* as bad as he really is—so different from others. And it might have been Greville instead of poor Terence. Isn't it dreadful about him! I shall go by the one o'clock train to-morrow. Of course, you won't think of coming?"

"Of course, I shall!"

"Maureen!—what's the matter? You look as if you had got your death-blow. You are not going to faint, are you?"

"No—no—no," staggering to a chair.

"Oh, I forgot; you must feel it—the poor fellow was so desperately in love with you. Here," and she rushed to a carafe, "drink this water."

"What do you mean?" pushing away the glass and spilling half the water.

"Moll, dear, I shouldn't have told you—it was a slip of the tongue."

"Tell me this moment, quickly—quickly—quickly!"

"Well, then, Grev wrote it to me. He was thanking Terence for all his kindness, and said he failed to understand how he could have sacrificed so much for two strangers; and then he confessed that it was all done for your sake, and that it counted as nothing. He loved you, and he thought he ought to tell Grev, who was your nearest of kin, and Grev offered to back him up. But he refused. He said you did not care—you would never know. He had once had hopes, but the weight of your riches had crushed them." She paused, breathless.

"What else?"

"He said you would never know, and he would never forget."

"Oh, Nita—Nita, why did you not tell me—sooner?"

"But, my dear, I only knew three days ago; and I really have no business to tell you at all."

"And I may be too late to see him alive!"

"Then, you do care, Maureen?—and, indeed, don't wonder. Oh, what hard lines, if the only man you loved should *die*."

Maureen made no reply. She was hastily turning over the leaves of a Bradshaw, on which her tears were raining fast.

"There is a train at seven in the morning; we will go by that."

"Very well ; the sooner the better. I shall tell Aunt Lizzie and the girls that I am compelled to leave on account of Grev—and so I am. I'll make it all plain that you are coming with me to keep me company; they will never suspect that you are breaking your heart for old Madame's grandson. Stay here, and I'll manage everything. My poor, dear Moll," kissing her, "you may leave this to *me*."

Nita proved as good as her word. She undertook all arrangements, wired to her husband to prepare him for their arrival, announced their departure to the sorrow-stricken D'Arcys, and the following evening found the sisters jolting away on a car from Carra Station. It was almost dark when they rattled down the familiar street. Outside the hotel, a crowd of people were assembled, talking together earnestly in low voices—they were waiting for news of Terence.

Sir Greville, with his head and hand in bandages, stood in the doorway to receive his relations. After a hasty greeting Nita put the vital question—

"How is he?"

"Still alive ; but in a bad way, raving and delirious. We brought him here at once. He is in a room on the ground-floor, and his old

nurse, and the dog, will scarcely let a soul go near him."

"I suppose we dare not venture!" said Nita. "Auntie gave me a quantity of grapes."

"No—no. I don't think it would be any use. Oh, good gracious, Maureen! what have you done to yourself? What has happened?"

"I wish to see him," she answered in a low voice.

"*You*—I understand. Well, then, my dear, you shall see him. Come with me here." And he walked away softly towards a distant door.

In another moment Maureen was standing inside it. At first Mrs. O'Hara stared blankly, and then beckoned her forward.

"So that's how it is with you, dear! God help you!" she whispered. "Ye are free to come to look on the last of him—aye, and the last of the Desmonds."

Terence was lying on a small camp-cot. His face was already worn, his eyes bright and sunken. He was talking in a low, rapid voice.

"I told you how it would be if you made Tom back! He has no more chance of playing back than a water-buffalo. And Kevill, such a good hitter, just wasted as number one. Now then, rush it! That was worth the hustle—listen to the cheering! If we get this goal, the cup

is ours. I'm playing old Harry—he is best in a scrimmage, and can turn on a sixpence. Troop-serjeant Cooper, is it?—tell him to wait. No, I don't fancy that new stud-bred—too long in the pasterns. Wants *me* to be introduced to her!—no, I'm hanged if I can stand that sort of woman; she would be calling me by my Christian name in half an hour."

"Yes, she's gone! lost! gone for ever! You and I must just grin and bear it. Oh, my God! but I cannot bear it. Where's that fellow with the rock? Drop it! I say, drop it!"

* * * * *

He ceased, and closed his eyes wearily.

"There, now! that's how he goes on," explained Mrs. O'Hara. "Sometimes it's the horses—or Miss Constance—or the soldiers; but it's mostly a young lady—as I take it, is yourself."

"Mrs. O'Hara, here's the doctor," interrupted Sir Greville, thrusting in his head; "so, Maureen, you must clear out, for the present."

* * * * *

During that long October night Maureen never slept, but crept to the door of the sick-room for news from hour to hour. By daylight she heard that the patient had fallen asleep; the ice had arrived; and another surgeon was

on his way. Late in the afternoon, Mrs. O'Hara came to her stealthily, and said—

"He knows you are here, dear; he must have heard your voice; and yet ye never spoke above a whisper, and that outside the door."

"May I see him?"

"That's as you wish yourself; but I believe he'd give his last breath for a sight of ye."

Terence was now himself. He lay propped up, with his dog beside him; the creature's pitiful expression would have stirred the heart of a stone. It is a positive fact that his eyes were red-rimmed, his face furrowed with tears.

His master smiled faintly when Maureen entered, and said, "How good of you! You see we have all been in the wars, of course! You have returned to nurse your brother. He will soon be all right."

"And—*you*?" she faltered, with white lips.

"I'll be all right too, I hope. Miss D'Arcy, I wanted to ask a great favour—I'd like you to have Lost."

"Oh—don't!"

"The poor chap will miss me more than anyone, and I know you are fond of dogs. Do not look so sad. I'm not afraid of death. I've few belongings—not much to live for."

"Oh, Terence!" she cried, "you are breaking my heart! Won't you live for *me*?"

He turned his head and looked at her incredulously.

"Yes;" and she fell on her knees and took his burning hand in both of hers. "I'm a bold, unmaidenly girl, I know. Still, when it comes to being face to face with such an awful crisis in my life, oh, I *must* speak! If you go away into the other world, dear Terence, take with you the thought that I love you."

"That—you love *me*?" he repeated, in a husky voice.

The speech was so unexpected that it came to him with the force of a blow, and sent a strange thrill through his body—something warm and stimulating seemed to fill his feeble heart with new life.

"It was worth while dying to hear that," he whispered. And he drew her fingers to his lips and kissed them.

* * * * *

The miraculous recovery of Terence Desmond was, by some, attributed to Mrs. O'Hara's nursing; others ascribed it to Judy Flood's prayers; the doctor gave the credit to his hardy, temperate life and iron constitution. But no one cast a thought to Miss D'Arcy!

CHAPTER XXXIII

BUYING THE TROUSSEAU

THE scene once more changes to Madame Desirée's show-rooms, and here we again discover Lady Flashe and Lady Fanshawe. They are ostensibly looking at hats, but are slyly scanning one another's spring toilettes, and mentally criticising their mutual weapons of warfare.

"And so Maureen is going to marry an Irishman, after all!" said Lady Flashe. "And not a sweep, but a coachman!"

"Who told you that he was a coachman?" inquired Lady Fanshawe, carefully arranging a delicate structure on her ruddy hair.

"Mr. Foulcher."

"Mr. Foulcher!—that little insect! I wonder you speak to him!"

"I know he has a *mauvaise langue*, is a shameless gossip, and selfish to the core; all the same I rather like him."

"Are rather afraid of him, you mean! At any rate, he makes *me* squirm. Well, it is true that Moll is marrying an Irishman; but he is descended from one of the oldest families in the kingdom. If he had his rights, he would be a prince."

"Nevertheless, Maureen will be, only plain missis; there will be no coronet on her note-paper."

"She will never be plain, with those eyes—even when she is quite old; and she will never be missis when she changes her name! So there is a puzzle for you."

"Your puzzle will keep—I want to hear more about the man. What is he like?"

"He is a true gentleman—a capital sportsman, extremely good-looking, and——"

"One of Lady Fanshawe's remnants!"

"Not at all. He never approved of *me* from the first—in fact, he could not endure me! But I intend to be a delightful sister-in-law, for I like him immensely."

"It is not often that the liking is all on *your* side—this is indeed a novelty! Now I want to verify a few statements."

"Verify away, my dear!" said Lady Fanshawe, who was critically considering the back view of her hat in a hand-glass.

"Is it true that he has not sixpence?"

"No. Since his grandmother died, and some deeds have been discovered which that wicked old woman had hidden, he has about three thousand a year, a vast encumbered estate, lovely old heirlooms—including the most splendid diamonds."

"Is it true that they tried to elope because you and Sir Greville would not hear of the engagement, and were caught and brought back?"

"No"—now becoming scarlet, and turning away her face, as she hastily removed the hat; "that is old Fouché again! I declare, I should like to electrocute him! They were never anything but above-board and honourable; and——well, I owe him more than I can ever repay."

"Repay! You've given him your sister; she ought to go a long way towards settling *that* account."

"She gave herself with all her heart."

"Are they much in love?"

"Yes; but they are not demonstrative, and spare our blushes."

"And when is it to be?"

"Next month—I'm ordering some of the trousseau now! She has given me a free hand, and some of the gowns are dreams of beauty. What do you say to orange velvet and sable?"

"I say that she will never wear it! Nita, I must confess that I should like to see this wonderful Irishman who has captured Maureen's cold heart and great fortune; whom you swear by, though he is indifferent to you; and to whom you are under some *mysterious* obligation. When will he be on view, dear?"

"He is in town now."

"He is *not* the man who sat next Maureen at the Haymarket last night?" she demanded with unusual energy.

"Why not?" returned Nita, with airy triumph.

"Well!"

"Yes, isn't it *well*?" with a complacent smile.

"There's nothing of the bog and brogue about him! Teddy said he had been in the service; but old Fouché told me——"

Lady Fanshawe's eyes kindled, her cheeks blazed.

"Dulcie, if you ever quote old Fouché

to me again, I declare I shall have to drop you! Look here; send away your victoria and drive back to lunch, and I think I can safely promise you a private view of Terence!"

THE END

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